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FEATURE DETECTIVE STORY

"GRAY GLOVES"

by MARIO SCO

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"GRAY GLOVES"

by Marion Scott

CHAPTER ONE

"AS I've told you before, Carr," Gaines said impatiently, "crime detection is a matter of hard work, plus a reasonable amount of brains."

"Nothing very startling about that statement," I replied ungraciously, stamping my numbed feet.

"I didn't intend it to be startling," responded my imperturbable friend, banging for the fifth time on the heavy door of the "Jolly Jug." "Where's everybody?" he set the echoes ringing, and then we noticed that the music had stopped.

Unaccountably Gaines and I exchanged glances in the dimness of the rustic porch. We had been lured from the cold ride cityward by the mellow light across the freshly fallen snow and the cheerful strains of dance music. Now the lack of sound from within seemed strange—no murmur of voices, no subdued laughter. Gaines turned abruptly to the wide, bright window which I knew gave a full view of the dining-room. As he bent forward to peer in the heavy brown curtains slid together and the scene was hidden.

"Well, I'll be——" Gaines stopped. "Say, Carr, this looks funny to me. I've stopped here a dozen times this late and later; it's usually an all-night place."

I started disgustedly toward the car. I had particularly desired a cup of Johnathan Bye's famous coffee; then I noticed Gaines was not following me.

I caught a glimpse of his tall figure disappearing around the corner of the Jolly Jug, and followed him, slightly out of temper—it was nearly midnight and I was frankly hungry.

In three minutes my discomfort was forgotten. Gaines was kneeling in the snow peering in at a small, uncurtained window nearly flush with the ground. The dining-room of the Jolly Jug was lower than the ground to the rear and we had a clear view of the room.

It was brightly lighted, the eight small tables in their usual order, one in the corner showing signs of having been recently used. Instead of the lively company I expected to see, there was only Johnathan Bye seated before the wide fireplace. He was slightly turned toward us, his white head resting against the high carved back of the chair.

Gaines tapped sharply on the pane. "Hello, Johnathan; open up, will you!"

"He's asleep," I suggested. "Maybe had a drink or two."

Like a vise, Gaines's lean fingers fastened on my arm. "Carr, look there by the door, under those curtains."

The excitement in his usually cool voice shook me. I pressed closer to the pane. There on the rich rug lay a woman's slipper, a dainty, aluring thing of dull gold. Even as I stared it twisted, and I made out some six inches of slender ankle above it. Then it moved again, with a queer, jerky motion, receding slowly, till with a final jerk it disappeared, and the somber curtain settled into place. All the time Johnathan Bye did not stir.

Gaines rose swiftly. "Something funny here, Carr. I'm going to have a look."

That was easier said than done. The Jolly Jug was in reality an old-fashioned house, remodeled but slightly.

Its small, odd windows were all securely locked, and it was only after considerable work that we gained entrance through the kitchen door with Gaines's skeleton key.

The first thing that struck me was the silence. The room was warm and fragrant with the odors of cooking. A huge range glowed cheerfully, white pots and pans gleamed; on a snowy table lay the remnants of a head of lettuce—Johnathan was famous for his salads.

We passed down a long hall to the dining-room. Silence again, though the room had the air of having been recently occupied. There was the aroma of cigarettes, perfume that could only mean a woman, flowers—I discovered them, a gorgeous cluster of Killarney roses—laying crushed unler an overturned chair by the table in the corner; near them a froth of lace that proved to be a handkerchief.

The cigarettes were still smoking—damp where lips had pressed them—the coffee in the blue cups was warm, two dainty miniature laddies in stiff pink skirts proved to be the covering for small cartons of ice cream. Gaines took it all in swiftly, then his keen eyes swept the empty room, coming to rest on the figure by the fire.

Johnathan Bye was dead! After the first stab of horror, I realized that I was not surprised—but how—and why—and by whom? Useless questions at the moment. There was no sign of violence visible, except an ugly bruise beneath his right eye—a blow, it appeared, but not by any stretch of the imagination a thing to cause death.

He appeared to have seated himself quite suddenly—his large, pale hands hung limply—his flat face was turned toward the curtains as if he, too, had been staring at that golden slipper—eyes wide, loose lips parted—on the whole face such an expression of horror that I turned away, feeling sick.

Gaines straightened slowly, brows puckered. Again he took in the warm, empty room, then jerked aside the curtains. They opened to a smaller room, evidently used for reception purposes. It was empty. The polished floor was thickly strewn with skins and shaded lights gleamed behind greenery. On a divan lay a woman's ermine cape, a nobby toque of the same rich fur beside it. The cape was tumbled carelessly as if hastily discarded. It squirmed like something alive in my hands.

Under the edge of the divan I caught the gleam of gold—a fragile mesh bag, the lining pulled out, coin purse open and empty; a leather fold that looked as though it had been comfortably stuffed with bills, empty also.

Gaines touched me. In his hand he held three softly glowing globules. "Pearls," I murmured.

He nodded. "Found them scattered; looks like a broken necklace."

"Robbery?" I hazarded. He did not reply.

I laid the cape down. Gaines was examining a gray fedora. Beside it was a gray silk scarf and one crumpled gray glove. He turned to me. "Well?"

Gaines knew well enough I wouldn't have any suggestion. I never do; I'm no good at that kind of thing.

"Notify Fleming," was all my offering.

Gaines smiled in that irritating assured way he has at times.

"Wait a bit, Burton, my boy," he counseled. "Let's have a look above-stairs."

We did, and discovered exactly nothing. There were six handsome bedrooms all furnished with a subtle suggestion of decorous impropriety, suggesting intrigue of

one kind or another. They were barren of any clue to the tragedy below.

The thing was getting on my nerves with that silence heavy with lingering fragrances —seeming almost to speak with the hushed voices that must have filled it so short a time ago.

As we reached the dining-room all my meanderings fled. A cold breath of night air touched me, the linen covers on the tables moved stealthily, as if unseen diners stirred them. I saw that the front door was open and the carved chair before the fireplace empty!

The snow on the porch showed plainly the marks of our impatient feet, then, trailing off to the right, large footprints, far apart, as if the fugitive had run in great leaping strides, the toes of his boots digging deep into the snow. There came the whipping of a motor, dying to a steady purr, and the white stillness of the December night settled over us.

"He had a car parked by that side road," Gaines muttered. "He's got a start now." He followed the tracks, finding, as he surmised, that a heavy car had stood in the shadow of the trees about a hundred yards from the inn.

I felt guilty to stand there and let him ride away.

"Why, Gaines, that was the murderer, there's no donbt of that, and, what's more, he's taken the body of Bye with him."

Gaines snorted softly.

"Burton, my boy, use your head. How much would you say Johnathan Bye weighed?"

"Close to two hundred," I admitted.

"Exactly. And with that burden over your shoulder, could you, or any other man, make the speed indicated by those great strides. I think not, Burton; we'll find Bye somewhere around his inn."

He turned toward the house.

"Come on, I have an idea."

I felt relieved to hear that, for I was certain I didn't have any, though at first I couldn't make much of Gaines's. He concentrated his attention on the reception-room, while I took another look at the dining-room, and so found something that bore out my theory of robbery.

On the massive oaken sideboard were the prints of dishes marked plainly in the light coating of dust. "Silver," I thought, and jerked open a drawer. It was tumbled roughly and cleaned out completely, several black leather cases that might have held silver dumped carelessly to one side. I heard Gaines calling:

"Carr, what's your idea of that shoe we saw?"

I lighted a cigarette.

"It looked to me as though the woman might have been hurt, or maybe fainted, recovered and was dragging herself along the floor."

"Not so bad," he said slowly. "Not so bad. I thought so at first myself—but, see here, what about this theory"—his black eyes were literally on fire behind his glasses —"did you notice anything unusual about the movement of that foot?"

"Nothing but that it was slow and jerky."

He rose excitedly.

"Jerky, you've said it; you mentioned the word—jerky. Now, try it if you like—drag yourself along the floor. I don't care how badly you're hurt and the movement is more or less steady. You do the dragging with your arms—one or both, you'd have to—that argues they're held firmly on the floor, and that very fact would serve to keep the body steady."

"I don't see," I complained.

"No, of course you don't, Carr, but you will. Say, now, that the woman was hurt, but that she was not dragging herself——"

I felt an uncomfortable prickling among my hair roots.

"You mean some one else was dragging her?"

Gaines nodded.

"That's what I mean, Burton, my boy; you said it."

"But where?"

"That's the point—where? Well, it can't be so difficult, there's no exit to this room, only the windows, and they're high and small, also locked, with metal screening on them—there's no concealment, so it follows she must be here."

I could not help a swift glance over my shoulder, the perfume from that cape was so insistent. Then I had an inspiration.

"You mean there's a secret compartment somewhere?"

Gaines smiled tolerantly.

"Possibly nothing so romantic. Say, just a—well, where did Johnathan keep his excellent and forbidden liquors?"

"A cellar?"

"Exactly."

He kicked the rugs aside, and we went over the polished floor with the aid of his powerful flashlight. For twenty minutes the search was barren, then I found a crack just a little too wide between two boards. Gaines fitted his knife in the opening, exerted a little strength, and it came up, disclosing a square four feet of darkness.

Gaines whistled softly and shot the light down narrow steps, shadowy piles of cases, at the foot of the stairs the huge body of Johnathan Bye. There he lay among his cases of precious wines, as if he had yielded to a momentary drowsiness and slumped forward on his face.

Gaines was hastily examining the room. It was not large and was crowded with case after case of fine liquors. I heard a smothered exclamation from Gaines. He was bending over a pile of cases in a corner; from behind one protruded a dainty golden slipper.

A body lay there. She was a young woman, possibly twenty-eight, in a daringly low gown of gold stuff that looked like a cloud, crusted over with things that sparkled under the dim light. Her hair was gold also, dressed low about her shapely head, and just over the right ear, caught in the shining meshes, was a wilted Killarney rose.

"Devil of a mess, Carr. Somebody shot and dragged her here, doubtless while we were trying the windows. But who was playing when we came up? It sounded like a whole orchestra."

I stopped him there. Johnathan frequently employed some very good musicians; but I also remembered, hidden behind a bank of ferns in the dining-room, was an automatic piano—not one of those awful thundering unmusical things, but an instrument of real merit, giving forth violins, drums—the whole make-up of a real orchestra—and was worth hearing. It did not play on the insertion of a coin, but by pressure of a button.

It was a startling thought, but I seemed to see the murderer starting that thing of strings and wires to cover the sound of his brutal work.

Very carefully we replaced the body behind the cases and climbed out of that hole. Then Gaines said a surprising thing.

"Carr, we're going to go on about our business and say nothing about this discovery. Let the police find it in their own time."

"But, Gaines——"

"Yes, I know we're taking a chance, but I'll explain it all to Fleming later; just at present I have an idea, and I don't want my name mentioned in connection with this case."

We arranged things exactly as we had found them, leaving the front door wide. Our tracks showed, of course, but that could not be helped.

Our drive to the city was wordless. Gaines bent low over the wheel, face hard. I leaned back conscious that I was very tired and tried not to think of the golden slipper.

CHAPTER TWO

GAINES was up before me next morning. He never seems to feel the loss of sleep, and looked fresh and unwearied when I entered our pleasant living-room.

I thought at first that he was one, then I saw a tall, dignified man standing before the window overlooking the Avenue. He turned as I entered.

Gaines introduced him briefly.

"Mr. Ault. This is my good friend and assistant, Ault. He was out when you called the other day."

Mr. Ault bowed gravely and returned to his seat by the table. He was very pale, with deep lines cut into his austere face. I

judged him about fifty-five, with thinning gray hair and strong gray eyes under heavy black brows.

Mr. Ault called last Wednesday to ask my assistance, but as the case was not in my line——"

"Perhaps if you had taken it this would not have happened." Ault put in gravely.

Gaines smiled pleasantly.

"But what has happened?"

Ault frowned.

"My wife has disappeared, and I am unable to find any trace of her; it is on that I want your assistance."

"Of course. Let us resume the matter where we dropped it. You say she left yesterday morning?"

"At eight o'clock."

"Telling you——"

"That she was going to spend the day shopping, dine with friends, attend theatre and return home late."

"I see—and these friends?"

Ault's pale face flushed.

"I may as well admit that most of my wife's friends are unknown to me. Some are of a rather giddy character—of which I do not approve. They, in turn, do not care for me—we moved in different circles."

"Yet you doubtless knew a few of them."

"Yes, some of her women friends. I have called on all of them—none of them have seen her."

"You have asked uolice aid?"

"I have not. I suppose a man of my years and sober interests makes a grave mistake in marrying a young, beautiful girl. It is only natural that after a time she should return to those of her own age. I have not been unaware of this; naturally, it is not a pleasant thought." He leaned forward. "Mr. Gaines, I have asked you to find her for me because sometimes I think, I fear, the circumstances may be of such a nature that they must be kept secret; with police aid this is impossible."

"You mean there might be another man?"

He nodded. I could not help pitying him.

"You have some reason for your suspicion, I suppose. Have you any idea of this person's identity?"

"No—I may be doing her a great injustice. She has men friends, of course—I did not object to that—yet at times I have thought——" he paused unhappily.

Gaines nodded.

"Very well, Mr. Ault, I will do what I can. The first thing I should like would be to take a look at Mrs. Ault's apartments. I may do that?"

"I will drive you out," he offered. I went for my coat.

The Ault home was what one might have expected from the master's austere character. Rich, rather somber, a little heavy and old-fashioned, just the kind of a place to pall on a young, pleasure-loving woman.

Mary Madeline Ault's rooms were as different from the balance of the house as twilight and morning. Bright, airy, long French windows, gay chintzes—furnishings rather sadly jumbled as to style—dainty naked Cupids, gorgeous gilt roses, drifts of crimson-and-gold pillows, fragile French watercolors, the page from a flashy theatrical sheet pinned on a curtain—in short, just the sort of a room you might imagine a woman to have who doubtless married an older man for his money—beautiful, breathless, a little cheap, rather heartless—entirely feminine.

At Gaines' request Ault left us. I can never get over the feeling of prying in a place like that. Rumpled silken things and crumpled cambric things, twisted gloves, waiting slippers, all make me feel guilty and shy.

Fortunately, Gaines has no such qualms. He went through the missing lady's possessions as if he were her maid, sorted programs, opened letters, pried into boxes, examined gowns, and rose at last, a look of satisfaction on his face.

"All right, Carr; that's all."

We left Mr. Ault, promising to advise him as soon as we had any news. In the car Gaines called he produced a slip of paper.

"Here are the addresses of three gentlemen. They are evidently on friendly terms with the lady, since they send her notes beginning 'Sunnyhair' and 'Dear Old Kid,' and quantities of roses and urgent requests

for dates. Of course, they may be just acquaintances—there seems to be a tendency in our younger married people to that sort of familiarity."

He glanced at the paper.

"We'll try Benton Brown first."

Brown proved to be a pale, listless young man, who did not seem so young after a second look at him. He was lounging in his expensive bachelor apartments, in lilac dressing-gown, reading the sporting sheet and sipping whisky-and-soda.

He was quite affable in a weary sort of way, yawned continuously and told us he had been on a house-party in the mountains with some friends, returning only this morning. These facts were not hard to verify, so Benton Brown was dismissed.

Emmet Harkman was a different person. He was short and burly, flashily dressed, with prominent black eyes and a frankly pugnacious disposition.

"Now, if that old Grandpa Ault is tryin' to get info for a divorce, count me out. Maddie's a good friend of mine, and we've had some rip-snorting times, but he can't prove nothing wrong, and I ain't got a thing to tell."

He balanced on his thick legs and jammed a huge cigar into his mouth.

Gaines was very soothing and politic.

"I assure you nothing is further from Mr. Ault's mind than divorce. The fact is Mrs. Ault has been missing since yesterday morning and he is naturally worried."

Hhe cigar tilted down as the thick lips fell apart.

"Oh, so that's the low-down. Well, I'll be—I'll be——"

What Mr. Harkman would have been is hard to tell, for Gaines interrupted him.

"What we're interested in knowing is where you were last night."

He laughed unpleasantly.

"Oh, so you are? Well, brother, I was attendin' a first-rate prize-fight in the basement of an old warehouse that I suppose you'd give a pretty penny to locate.

"We had some real scrappers there and I won——" he stopped, glowering. "That's nothing to do with it. I didn't see Maddie, but I ain't goin' to prove it unless I have to, 'cause some of my friends was in this other—but, looka here, fellow, if the worst comes to worst, little Emmie can show where he was and don't you forget it!"

We didn't, but I gathered from Gaines' disgusted expression that he was glad to be free from Little Emmie and satisfied he knew nothing about Mrs. Ault's disappearance.

"Leaves one," he muttered as we drove away. "One Denny Glover. If he proves a blank we'll have to try something else."

Glover seemed at first appearance likely to prove the blankest blank of them all. His man told us that we could not see him, as he was ill, having been confined to his bed since the previous afternoon. Gaines produced his card and scribbled something across it. Whatever it was, its effect was magical. We were told that Mr. Glover would see us if we didn't mind coming into his bedroom, and if we would not object to waiting a few minutes, and if we would excuse the appearance of the rooms, as the master had required considerably waiting upon, etc.

The place, for the living-room of a wealthy young bachelor at two-thirty in the afternoon did require apology. Every conceivable space was overflowing with masculine attire.

We found the young man propped up in bed, thick, curly hair tumbled, cheeks flushed, only one eye visible from beneath a thick bandage, and that very bright with fever. He received us cordially, and I felt an instinctive liking for him—there was an air of breeding about Denny Glover that had been entirely lacking from Mrs. Ault's other friends.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said, in a slightly unnatural voice; "I'm laid out, and we were just getting ready to slip anchor—in other words move—things in an awful mess; then I came down with this beastly grippe and neuralgia in my face." He pointed to the bandage.

Gaines seated himself by the bed.

"That's all right; we're not bothered with housekeeping. What I particularly want to know is when you last saw Mrs. Wilson Ault."

The flush died out of the boy's cheeks. He spoke with an effort.

"Why—now, this is Thursday—it was Monday last. I had luncheon with her, and we took in a show. I was going to call her today, but——"

Gaines's eyes were boring into him.

"Didn't by any chance see her last night at the Jolly Jug?"

Whatever else he may have been, Denny Glover had poise. He stirred slightly on his pillows and answered without faltering:

"Jolly Jug? Madeline? No, not me." He continued to regard Gaines with interest. "What's the row? I didn't understand your message that you wanted to see me about Mrs. Ault—what's wrong?"

"She has been missing since yesterday morning, and there was a woman discovered at the roadhouse murdered, so I naturally——"

Glover propped himself on his elbow.

"Good Lord," he said softly, his concern no more than might have been expected on hearing that a good friend of his might have met a violent death. "Madeline? Oh, no, that can't be true. Good Lord!" and he sank back weakly. "Why, that's awful, but it can't be Madeline." He stared at Gaines out of a feverishly bright eye.

"We're hoping not," Gaines said gravely; "still, we don't know. Give me some idea of Mrs. Ault's appearance, will you?"

He grinned boyishly.

"Say, she's a knockout—golden lady, you know. That kind of hair, and the bluest eyes. Oh, I'm no good on description—there's a photograph of her in that drawer." Gaines found it. He studied it for a long time, his face giving no hint of what he saw.

"Good likeness?" he asked at last.

"Corking! Only she's lots prettier—life, fire, all that sort of thing—can't get it in a photo. Oh, she's a beauty!"

"Yes, she is," Gaines agreed shortly, and handed the picture to me. It gave me a turn, the eyes were so merry, the lips so smiling, the lilt of the sunny head so vital, yet I knew that she lay crumpled behind one of Johnathan Bye's wine cases, a wilted Killarney rose in her hair, one golden slipper——— Then I heard Glover speaking.

"You say she's disappeared—no trace—since yesterday?"

"That's the size of it." Gaines rose. "So you can't help us? Well, thank you for letting us in. Who's the second lady, if I'm not impertinent?"

Then the best in Denny Glover became evident. He smiled and all the lines of pain or worry, or whatever they were, disappeared.

"That's my mother," he said softly. "She's wonderful," and his tone was so different than when he had spoken of the "Golden Lady." "Been an invalid for seven years—but she's thoroughbred, never a cheep. Doc says a shock of any kind would break the thread of her life, so we're awfully careful. Dunstan phoned her this morning, as he always does, to report on my precious health, that I was as chipper as a lark, but prevented from calling by serious business affairs. I sent her roses, though."

"Killarney?" Gaines asked unexpectedly.

"No, Lady Washingtons, that's the kind she likes. Well, sorry I can't be of help—you're surely wrong about Madeline. Say, let me know, will you, and anything I can do——"

Dunstan showed us out. He was a kindly, simple fellow, very deferential and anxious to please. He apologized for the appearance of the room. Gaines smiled kindly.

"The young master leans to brown, eh, Dunstan? Well, I don't blame him, with that chestnut hair and hazel eyes—I didn't see the other, but I suppose they match."

Gaines has a way with him at times. Dunstan expanded under the friendliness.

"Yes, sir, brown's his color. Never knew him to wear anything else, except for evening, sir—says its lucky for him—and I believe it is, for the first time he puts on gray he gets sick."

"Gray?"

"Yes, sir, he made one departure, and I'll warrant there won't be another. Some friend sent him a pair of gray gloves—very handsome they were, sir—and what must

the young master do but outfit to match the gloves." Dunstan stepped closer and winked slyly. "I'm thinking it might have been a lady, sir, since he was so anxious to please."

CHAPTER THREE

ON the street Gaines drew a deep breath and smiled at me.

"Well?"

I always know when he says that he has an idea of his own, and wants to prove that I haven't one.

"I think Glover knows something about that murder," I said doggedly.

"Burton, I'm surprised at you; wasn't the boy sick in bed, and such a likable fellow, sending roses to his mother."

"I don't care, he's too nervous and strained. You can say anything when you don't have to prove it."

Gaines slapped me heartily on the back, a familiarity he seldom indulges in.

"Burton, you're improving; get an idea and stay by it, that's the way. Now, let's go to Alvardo's store."

I long ago ceased to be surprised at anything Gaines suggests, so I meekly accompanied him to the exclusive men's outfitters on Fifth Avenue.

The particular clerk who favored us with his attention seemed more languid and exclusive than usual.

"Really, sir, I fear you're awsking the impossible. A pair of gray suede gloves? Deah me, we've supplied so many in the lawst week."

"But these were sold to a lady—most of your customers are men, I believe."

The salesman admitted this was true.

"What sort of lady?"

"A very beautiful lady, young, with golden hair and blue eyes—just the sort that would probably pick on you to serve her."

"Ahem! Ah, well, of course"—he settled his faultless tie—"I do happen to recall something of the sort. She comes in here at times, her husband has an account—something unique at Alvardo's. I say, Misteh French."

Another youth, slightly less royal in appearance, having a decidedly pug-nose, came up. A lengthy conference followed, then he remembered.

"You mean Mrs. Wilson Ault, I think. Yes, I did sell her a pair of gray suede gloves. Very handsome. She had them delivered by special messenger"—he turned swiftly to a small book—"to Mr. Dennis Glover, Artfell Apartments. Yes; that's all right, you're quite welcome."

"Well?" I challenged when the crowd again swallowed us. "What does that prove?"

"Perhaps nothing," Gaines admitted. "There's more than one pair of gray suede gloves sold at Alvardo's. Still, the glove we discovered last night at the Jolly Jug bore their crest—no other word fits the way that Italian signs his name, impressed in pure gold—to all appearances, on the very exclusive button, and today I found this in Denny Glover's fireplace."

He handed me a button, a fragment of burned gray leather still clinging to it. On the face was the distinctive crest, as Gaines called it—Alvardo.

"I told you so," was all I could think to say, wondering why I felt so depressed.

I left Gaines soon after that. I had some affairs of my own, and it was close to five when I came bounding into the room, bursting with excitement. The double crime at the Jolly Jug had been discovered, and the papers had screaming headlines about it.

Gaines looked up annoyed at my noisy entrance, then I saw that Inspector Fleming was with him, and knew that I would have nothing to tell. Bert Fleming is an old friend of ours. He's a quiet, impassive sort of person, with large, square hands and feet and a deep scar over his right eye.

He shook hands with me gravely, and Gaines motioned me to a seat.

"Carr, I've been confessing to Fleming how we laid ourselves liable to being accessories after the fact last night. You know the Jolly Jug affair has been discovered." I nodded. "My reason for wishing to keep out of it for a time has to do with our morn-

ing visitor, Wilson Ault. He called on me last week and wanted me to take up the job of shadowing his wife.

"Well, as soon as she dropped out of sight he looked me up again. My first thought was of the body we discovered last night, and when I saw her picture today at Glover's it settled it to my satisfaction, so I called Fleming in, confessed the whole thing, and had him get in touch with Ault. What was his attitude, Fleming, when you suggested that his wife might have been murdered?"

"What you might expect from a man who worshipped her."

"Exactly, and you suggested that he come down and view the body?"

"I did. He was very nervous, seemed to dread it; can't say that I blame him. Well, we walked in where she lay. I turned on the lights, and for a moment I thought he would collapse. Then he drew a deep breath and said, 'Thank God—it's not Mary!' That's all."

"Then that's not a picture of Mrs. Ault we saw this morning. They were identical—hair, eyes, mouth, expression——"

"You can't tell about the color of hair in a photograph," Gaines put in, "and it's possible for two women to look alike, though it would be a coincidence."

"Well, a man ought to know his own wife," Fleming offered practically.

There was no denying that, yet——

There came the sound of hurried footsteps, the protesting voice of our negro servant, old Shad.

"No, suh, I cain't 'low you to enteh, suh," then the door was flung open and Wilson Ault burst into the room. He was white as a ghost, and trembling violently. The sound of his heavy breathing filled the silence. Before one of us could speak, he broke out angrily:

"Damn you, Gaines, I thought I told you I didn't want the police in on this, and here they've been torturing me with the story that Mary's been murdered—taking me to see a dead woman." He dropped into the chair I placed for him, gray head buried in his twitching hands, shoulders shaking.

Gaines spoke quietly.

"I do owe you an apology, Ault, which I offer. In any case, I accept it is understood that I must work my own way—I made that clear yesterday. When I advised Inspector Fleming to get in touch with you I had his word that the affair should be handled quietly. Had the unfortunate woman proved to be Mrs. Ault, the matter would have been out of our hands, as far as keeping it secret. Since it is not, nothing more will be said about it."

He grew gradually calmer, at last lifting his white face, ravaged by suffering.

"Maybe I was too quick," he said wearily, "but I'll tell you it was awful." He straightened, throwing off his weakness fiercely. "I just had an idea, after that last experience, that Mrs. Ault might have gone to her sister's in Iowa. Fact is, Mary and I had some words the night before she disappeared. She was very angry with me, and as a punishment might have decided to give me a scare. Well, she has succeeded."

"Let us hope you're right," Gaines soothed. "You would like me to ascertain?"

"I've done that," he put in quickly. "I sent a wire just before I came up. If it should be true"—he rose slowly—"what a relief, what a relief!"

CHAPTER FOUR

DINNER was a particularly silent meal that night. The evening was depressing, with a cold, easterly wind bringing gusts of rain against the window. Gaines was restive and nervous. He prowled like a fidgety old woman, smoked half a dozen cigarettes without stopping, then started his usual hunt for his pipe.

It was exactly eight-thirty when the telephone rang. I answered it, and scarcely recognized Ault's voice—it was so happy and satisfied. He asked for Gaines. I handed the receiver to him and tried to imagine what he was hearing from the expression of his face. But after a good two minutes of "Yes, I see, of course, in-

deed," something reached him that actually made his teeth snap together and his eyes flashed like fire.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exploded. I could see his long, nervous fingers trembling round the instrument, and when he said, "All right, that's fine, drop in any time," and hung up the receiver, he faced me.

"Burton," he gasped, "it's all over—it's finished; that was Ault. He says he has had a wire from his wife and read it to me. 'Spending month with Lottie; don't worry. Love.—Mary.'"

"Now, what do you think of that?"

What I thought had to wait, for Shad poked his woolly head in with,

"Please, suh, Misteh Gaines, there's a real perky young laidy heah, askin' to see you, suh."

Shad always gives us some sort of an idea of the nature and appearance of our callers, and no matter how colorful his description, they are free from any intentional familiarity, so now the real "perky young laidy" was entirely impersonal with Shad.

I think Gaines hardly realized what he was doing when he told the darky to send her up. Plainly his mind was elsewhere, but it snapped back quickly enough when she entered.

The first thing I noticed about her was the amount of orange she wore, dabbed here and there—in frills and pleats and tucks—after that, her eyebrows. They were without doubt the most flexible and expressive I have ever seen. Under them, her eyes were keen and gray, red now about the lids as if with crying.

"I'm Mona Gray," she said quickly, her delicate hands fluttering. "I shouldn't be here, but I just had to come, I was so upset over it all when I saw that newspaper account. I can't believe it yet, but it is—it is—and I never had a dearer friend."

Quite suddenly she burst into tears and scrubbed her piquant face with a small lace handkerchief.

I saw Gaines groping his way out of the mists. He sat up slowly, smoothed his hair, adjusted his polka-dot tie, then the customary look of concentration came back to his eyes, and he inquired gently:

"But, my dear young lady, I don't know what you refer to."

She straightened abruptly—everything she did was quick and impulsive—and I was sure the girl was laughing, with the tears still wet on her cheeks.

"Of course you don't understand, and you must think me a silly chump. It's about Mary Madeline—Mrs. Ault——"

Gaines leaned forward.

"Yes," he prompted.

"Well, they published a picture of the poor woman who was killed at the Jolly Jug, and I immediately called up Wilson—he hates me, but I just had to—and he said it was a mistake, and that Mary was with her sister; but——"

Gaines held a restraining hand.

"Just a moment, Miss Gray. You are a friend of Mrs. Ault?"

She nodded, her sensitive face quivering.

"I was," she answered uncertainly, "for there isn't any Mrs. Ault at present. I just couldn't rest after seeing that picture, and I got them to let me in, and I saw her and—and"—she caught at her lip—"just one look was enough for me—as if I wouldn't know Mary Madeline Ault. Wilson's crazy."

She started using the handkerchief again. I let my cigar slip down, and it burned a large hole in my second-best trousers. I thought about the music that stopped so suddenly at the Jolly Jug, and the way Johnathan Bye sat so comfortably in his chair, and how his face looked when we saw it, and the slipper that jerked across the floor, and of Ault's voice when he phoned to tell us his wife was safe and well. Then I heard Gaines speaking:

"Now, let's get this straight, Miss Gray. How long have you known Mrs. Ault?"

She sighed and dabbed her face with a powder-puff, by which I knew she would cry no more.

"I've known her for seven years. We were in the chorus together—yes, Mary was on the stage. It was there Wilson first saw her and just made her marry him. I mean, he wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. She

talked it over with me, and I told her his money was all right, but I'd get tired of his Sunday face. I knew how she loved fun, but finally she lost her job and was padding her soles with pasteboard—and she married him—and the good Lord help her since. He's as jolly as an undertaker—expecting her to stay in nights and give up all the old kids. For a time she did. Then she cut loose, and it's been one scrap after another; but Mary was headstrong, and just went about with all the boys and pretended she wasn't married, and said all Wilson did was pay the bills——" She stopped for lack of breath.

"When did you last see her, Miss Gray?"

"Night before last. We were out at a little party, and there was one boy Mary was crazy about. She told me she was going to entertain him herself next night—that would be last night—so we needn't expect her with us."

"And this young man, this particularly favored one?"

She opened her gray eyes wide.

"Why, it's Denny Glover—awfully nice kid, too. I told Mary she'd better let him alone. He's one of the bluebloods, you know; awfully rich, classy old family and all that. But Mary wouldn't listen, and him"—she tossed her head expressively—"him, he was just eating out of Mary's paddy."

"And you're sure, quite sure, the dead woman really is Mrs. Ault?"

Sudden exasperation flashed in her eyes.

"My God, yes. Could I room with a girl for three years and not know her, dead or alive?"

"All right, Miss Gray; do something for me. Tell me just as clearly as you can about Mrs. Ault's personal appearance; about any little peculiarity of manner or oddities of speech."

"Mary had the queerest way of talking—fact is, Mary lisped. We used to tease her about it, but she couldn't help it, and Kate Spears—she's an awful cat—she said Mary did it 'cause it made her babyish. Anyway, all the boys thought of it as awfully taking, and when Wilson rushed her she used to tap his cheek and say, 'Oh, Wilthon, dear, hearth Mary,' and that big chump would rush right off and buy her another necklace."

Against the background of her chatter I caught a glimpse of the figures moving forward toward the tragedy that we knew at the Jolly Jug case. It was not hard to imagine the sober, middle-aged Wilson Ault falling an easy victim to Mary Madeline's lisp, her provocative eyes, her alluring mouth—if the dead woman behind Johnathan's wine cases was in reality Ault's wife. He had looked at her face and denied it, while her closest friend affirmed.

Where did Denny Glover and his gray glove come in? Was his the hand that moved that limp body over the rugs in that silent room, bumping, jerking that golden slipper out of our sight?

I came out of my musings to hear Gaines bidding Miss Gray good-night. The door closed behind her, and it seemed that a light had been turned off. Gaines was jerking on his coat.

"Come on, Carr, we're going out."

The pavement was slippery, the car skidded several times, fine rain misted the wind-shield. Gaines chose the least traveled streets, and presently the lights of the city were glittering like misty stars behind us, and I knew we were headed for the Jolly Jug.

Gaines was silent. I could see his grimly set lips and frowning brows, then I received the impression that we were followed. I said nothing about it for a time, because it might be only another car bound upon its own affairs, still we were driving slowly; it had plenty of time to pass, yet there it stayed just so far behind us.

"Step on it, Gaines," I suggested. He started out of his revery and we leaped into the night. The cold air rushed past my face. "Give her some more," I urged. Gaines humored me. The needle marked fifty; the other car was splitting the night. "Cut 'er down now," I advised, "the road's wet." He slowed to twenty, then to fifteen. I heard the roar of the motor behind; evidently the car was not so well under control. There was one unpleasant moment when I thought it would crash into

us. Then, with a savage shriek of the horn, it passed us and whirled into the night.

In five minutes it was out of sight. Glancing through the window five minutes later, I again saw the pursuing car. I knew it by the way the right light winked, and straightway mentioned it to Gaines.

"It must have been forced to pass us when we slowed," he decided, "then probably ran into that side road and waited, with lights out, until we went by. Well, let 'em come, Burton, let 'em come."

Come they did at a steady clip behind us, until the dark bulk of the Jolly Jug showed to our right, then they shot by and again we lost them. The place had an eerie appearance viewed through the dripping December night—no lights showing, though we knew a man from Headquarters was on guard.

He came out at a low whistle from Gaines, decidedly glad to see us.

"It's a lonesome job I drew," he confided. "Not that there's anything likely to happen—like it better if there was some excitement."

Gaines sympathized with him and offered a cigar.

"We just want to look around a bit, Garrity. Fleming knows about it—it's all right."

"Sure, Mr. Gaines, you can go in. I've been walkin' my beat outside, for all the cold—it's so cursed lonesome in there."

CHAPTER FIVE

WE did not turn on any lights, only used Gaines's flash. The curtains were all drawn, but we did not want to run the risk of frightening any one away if our hunch about being followed were true. I did not know exactly what Gaines wanted, but it was evident he was attempting to reconstruct the crime according to certain hypothesis. He very carefully examined the lock on the kitchen door, then slowly traversed the narrow hall to the dining-room—light turned on the floor.

He was thoroughly employed in his work, and seemed unconscious of the empty echoing loneliness.

"Carr," he suggested suddenly in the low tone that seemed suited to the time and place, "take your flash and go upstairs. I know Fleming's men have been over those rooms, still they might have missed something. You know the kind of things I want—anything, however unimportant it may appear. Go through the dresser-drawers, the closets; bring anything, a hairpin, a lodge-pin, a safety-pin. Hop along now."

I didn't relish the job. I thought it useless and foolish, though I knew Gaines scarcely did anything foolish; still he was not doing this—I was, and I wondered as I plodded up the creaking stairs if he only wanted to be rid of me while he figured out some point.

The rooms were cold and bleak and dark as the bottomless pit. I started in conscientiously. Every drawer was empty, every closet bare. The wind was rising and whistling through the chimney holes—once a shutter slammed and my heart nearly choked me. I cursed myself for an imaginative fool and was disgusted to find my hands trembling and cold as the dead—there, that was an unhappy comparison; it conjured a picture of that old villain, Johnathan Bye, before his cheerful fire, and the golden slipper that seemed to weakly kick itself out of existence.

Savagely I jerked open a drawer. It stuck. I yanked viciously. It clattered out and crashed to the floor. Something white fell at my feet. I picked it up. A stiff envelope addressed "Mr. Johnathan Bye, Jolly Jug, Walsham Road"—then the flash kicked out.

I jammed down on the button; it snapped uselessly. I shook it; it flickered once, then blackness, and it was at that moment I received the impression that some one was in the room with me.

I won't make any attempt to hide the truth, I was plain scared.

Various ideas flashed through my mind; the intruder must have been in the room when I came in. I took a step toward where a breathing sound came from, and it stopped momentarily, then began again. A

board creaked under my step and I squared my shoulders and walked boldly forward, cursing my useless light, and brought up with a bang against the wall. I stumbled, threw out my hands and came in contact with a body that heaved in my uncertain hold!

He lashed out suddenly, then we were panting and pounding. I felt the rough cloth of his coat, the powerful muscles beneath, the buttons on his vest, the chain across his front. Then he caught me a smashing blow on the mouth. I reeled, my fingers involuntarily clutching the chain. The next moment he had broken away. I heard padding footsteps dying away. Something warm and salty was on my lips, and I rushed after him, yelling at every step.

Gaines reached me just as I pulled up before an open window at the end of the hall. It had a straight porch with a low railing. We ducked across it. It was an easy drop to the higher ground to the rear. I had a leg over when Gaines pulled me back.

"Garrity's got him, Carr." There came the crack of shots, thin flashes in the darkness, then one stopped, the other spit spitefully. I crawled back, feeling weak and rather sick. We hurried downstairs.

The night was still as ever, rain falling monotonously, dripping drearily on the rotting leaves. We circled the house three times, calling, but no Garrity answered us.

I gave Gaines a sketchy account of what happened as we searched. I heard his short ejaculations of surprise and interest.

"The letter," he snapped, "you've got that?"

I had, but had completely forgotten it. Just as I handed it to him we heard a deep groan from a clump of bushes, and there we found Garrity, a hole drilled clean through his left shoulder. He was white-faced and cursing.

"The dirty devil plugged me, he did, and laid me out and got away," the words stopped with a little gasp and the big fellow folded up against my knee.

Between us we got him into the house and phoned Headquarters. In a surprisingly short time the ambulance came for him, with it three policemen. We told our story, and left streaking toward the city.

"Where to now?" I asked. There was a humming in my ears and my lip was swelling painfully, but I was mad clean through, and, for a timid man, in a most bloodthirsty frame of mind.

Gaines glanced at me inquiringly. "Feel like more?"

I nodded grimly.

"All right," he conceded, "there may be more, but just yet I can't decide—I will before we reach home."

And he did. It was close to eleven when he turned the car definitely. "Carr, we're going to see Denny Glover again."

I only nodded and felt for a match. Instead I found the five links of gold chain. I showed it to Gaines. He studied it carefully. "Watch chains are more or less alike, Carr," he said dryly; "still it may lead to something. Here's Glover's place—'spose he'll be in bed."

But he wasn't. He was dressed and pacing the floor when Gaines pushed unceremoniously past Dunstan and faced him. He gasped in astonishment, then the little color he had ebbed from his face, free now of its bandage, and sat down weakly.

"Well, you fellows get me," he sighed. "You're the last ones I expected to see. What's the row?" He nervously jerked open a window; the fire was burning brightly and the room was warm.

Gaines leisurely withdrew his gloves, his top-coat, his scarf, handing them to Dunstan, all the while scrutinizing Glover. When the man had gone we three sat down—Gaines in a deep chair by the fire, I to the right of the door and Glover facing the open window.

Gaines produced cigars. "Smoke?" he invited. The boy laughed nervously and took it; the fingers that held the match were unsteady."

"Well, shoot," he grated.

Still Gaines was silent, seemingly arranging his thoughts. At last without preamble he brought it out. "Glover, let's have the truth about the Jolly Jug. You were there last night."

He turned so white I thought he would

faint, and I heard his teeth clicking. "No, no," he denied unconvincingly.

"No good," Gaines reminded him. "Found your hat and scarf, also your glove—mate to the one you burned last night—in this room, the pair Mrs. Ault sent up from Alvardo's, so you had to outfit in gray to match, and wore it all to please her, I suppose. Funny you left without your hat. I found the doctor that dressed that cut for you; nasty one, too, three stitches—quiet little fellow off Walsham Road a bit. You woke him up near two o'clock. You see, it's no go."

I was surprised at the effect. Glover had been listening like a man in a trance.

In a few moments he controlled himself and looked up. "You've got me," he said dully. "I'd have explained it right away only for mother"—his voice broke—"she's hanging on by sheer nerve, and her belief in me—it breaks me all up to think——" He clenched his hands hard and squared his shoulders.

Gaines waited silently, the only sound the gentle tapping of the rain on the little balcony outside the open window. Then Glover sat up. He seemed older, calmer, stronger.

"Go ahead," insisted the detective.

"It was this way: I met Mrs. Ault four months ago at a party one of my pals gave, and I'll admit I fell for her right away. I guess she—well, she——" he blushed vividly. "Well, I won't say anything about her, but she and I had lots of good times, and finally we decided on a quiet little visit to the Jolly Jug."

"You suggested it, I suppose?"

He hesitated. "No," he admitted rather shame-facedly, "it was her idea. She wanted it to be her party, so she arranged everything. I met her there at seven, we had dinner, and a pleasant talk before the fire, danced some, then we had a friendly game of cards and, just to be good fellows, asked the old man to join us."

Gaines's eyes narrowed. "Johnathan Bye?"

"Yes, we were the only ones there, and he seemed a good scout."

"How much did you lose?"

Glover seemed surprised. "Well, it was aplenty," he admitted, "the old boy's a whiz—it was around five thousand."

"Go on."

"We played till pretty late, then Madeline suggested that we have a little more to eat, so Johnathan went to prepare it—served it on that little table in the corner. Everything was very pleasant and homey, when I heard the sound of voices to the rear. Didn't think about it at first, then they grew louder and seemed to indicate an argument. Madeline dropped her cigarette and listened. I saw she was disturbed. They came nearer; there was the sound of blows, and the old man ordering some one out of the place. I thought it might be a drunk strayed in, but Mary jumped up and ran to the door. I heard her cry out just once, then came the sound of a shot, and right before my eyes she swayed and fell. Old Johnathan came backing in slow-like, as if he was drugged. He had a plate in his hand and it slid down easy, and he made a funny croaking noise, clutched at his breast, and sat down in the chair."

He spoke monotonously. "I guess I was hypnotized for a moment. I saw Mary lying there so still, then the electric piano started to play some jazz thing. I came to life and reached Mary's side. She was dead—shot through the heart, and right there before me was——"

The silence of the room was shattered with the crack of a shot. Denny Glover gave a queer, choked cry, leaped up and crashed down on his face. I saw blood widening in a crimson stain on the ivory rug.

I don't know what happened next. After a while the mists cleared away. Gaines was crawling in through the window on the balcony and old Dunstan was hopping around uselessly, twisting his bony hands.

"A doctor—call one at once!" I chopped off the words at him, though I swear I thought it was useless. Glover lay flat to the floor. The blood kept spreading. I was afraid to move him, but Gaines picked him up gently and carried him to the bed.

It seemed hours before that doctor came, though it was really only twelve minutes.

The doctor did all sorts of things, or rather we did them at his crackling orders. The bullet that had been intended for the heart had punctured the left lung. The doctor phoned for a nurse, and I saw by his face that he didn't have much hope; still he worked frantically. Presently he straightened, and there was Denny Glover, white as the pillow he rested against, all bandaged and bound, looking like death if ever a live man did.

"He has a chance," the doctor admitted grudgingly somewhere around one o'clock, "a mighty slim one; still—well, he mustn't be moved or disturbed, and maybe—just maybe——"

We left at three when there wasn't anything more to do. I know I felt tired and rather sick, and Gaines's face was hard as granite.

"Some one was listening," I stated as we drove away.

"Yes, I found the marks of his boots outside, but nothing else. Some one followed us, wanted to know what we were about—trailed us to Glover's, and when he opened the window—it was some one who would rather commit murder again than have him tell. Now he may never have another chance."

"If he'd left that window down he'd be alive now."

Gaines jerked open the door of the car and jumped out. Home looked mighty good to me then.

CHAPTER SIX

I HAD only been asleep ten minutes when old Shad was touching my shoulder and offering me coffee. The sun was shining brightly and it was ten o'clock. Gaines had gone out and I didn't see him until evening.

He was at his desk busy as a campaign manager. I envied his self-control.

"Hello, Carr," he greeted. "Been busy?"

"Nope, haven't done a blasted thing but mope around and think."

"Bad business, boy," he lectured cheerfully. "Never gets you anywhere. Do something if it's only answer a forgotten letter or pay an old bill. Keep the mind moving. When affairs get to a deadlock, seemingly, it doesn't do any good to let your thinker stop, too. If you can't figure things out as they are, start thinking about something else; it will straighten out."

I glowered at him. I dislike preachy theories.

"Saw Ault to-day," he offered at last. "Seems like another man—showed me the wire—sure is happy. I'm glad for him, poor chap. Risky business marrying a giddy girl, as I've told you before, Carr. Anything new in the papers about the Jolly Jug?"

"Haven't you seen them?"

"Not since morning; been too busy. Let's see, now. Oh, all right, Shad, dinner ready? Come on, Burton, there's chops and new peas—real luxury in December."

He chatted pleasantly through dinner, which really was excellent. Shad is a wonderful cook; he knows how to stuff green peppers with rice and ham like they do in New Orleans.

"Expecting a visitor," Gaines informed me when we were settled with our pipes. Gaines had taken the first one he found, by which I knew that something was on his mind.

The visitor proved to be Wilson Ault. He looked thinner and more cadaverous than ever and I thought his eyes were unnaturally bright, but he seemed happier—talked of his wife a great deal, related incidents of her escapades, which he seemed to regard now as childish pranks.

I wondered what on earth Gaines wanted him there for, but presently the telephone rang and Gaines answered it.

"Yes," he said pleasantly, "this is Riverside 5749—Mr. Gaines speaking. Mr. Ault—yes, he's here. Shall I—oh, I see." He laughed contagiously and turned to Ault, who was regarding him with narrowed, curious eyes.

"Here's a surprise for you, old man, something you did't expect. Your wife has returned unexpectedly, and wants to speak to you."

Ault rose like an automaton; his lean face was darkly mottled.

"My wife," he said in a hoarse, unnatural voice, and took the receiver. The room was so still the voice came quite distinctly, and I swear, though I never heard Mary Madeline Ault speak, I got a distinct shock when I heard: "Hello, Wilthon, hearth your Mary."

Then the receiver clattered from Ault's hand, and like a madman he leaped at Gaines, long fingers clutching.

"It's a lie; she can't speak. It's not Mary—Mary——" His voice rose to a frenzied scream, purple veins knotting on his forehead. He kept moaning and sobbing, and Gaines took a revolver from his pocket.

Then I heard Gaines speaking, very slowly and coldly: "Now that's the truth, Ault, she can't speak, because you killed her at the Jolly Jug, and then shot Denny Glover so he couldn't tell. You might as well admit it. I have all the facts; so give it to us straight."

Just at that moment the door opened and Fleming entered. I think the sight of his impassive face finished what was left of Ault's courage. He sat huddled in a chair, hands twitching, dry lips moving.

Finally he burst into speech, and it was like the breaking of a long dammed stream. Deep-seated, strong emotions surged to the surface. We caught a glimpse of the man's soul in his harsh, rasping words:

"Yes, I killed her, and I'm glad of it, for she's made my life a hell for the last four years, and she's ruined more than me—other men—boys like Glover and Packard and Lynn. You didn't know them. Packard stole money to give her and went to the pen, and Lynn shot himself out West, and all the time she was my wife and bore my name and fooled me—only not as much as she thought."

Gaines nodded.

"I suppose the proper play would have been to have killed the other man, only there were too many of them, always a new one dangling after her—decent kids that didn't know what a vampire she was. And when she'd fleeced them for all they had, she forgot them and let them go to the devil."

He stopped, staring at the floor with dull eyes.

"You knew when you married her what she was, didn't you?" Gaines asked quietly.

"No, I didn't, but it wouldn't have made any difference. I loved her." He stated it calmly, a certain dignity about his broken figure. "Afterwards she told me her father had been in prison. But I didn't hold it against her—only when they began to work together, I couldn't stand it. After warning her so many times I grew sick of the sound of my own voice. I decided to do something else, though I didn't mean to kill her."

"Well?"

"I followed her to the Jolly Jug, made Johnathan let me in the back door—accused him of having Mary there. He denied it. We had words, and he attacked me and I struck him. I was mad, I guess, for I heard her voice, and a man's, laughing. Johnathan went before me to head me off. She heard me and came out of a room, and the sight of her, so lovely and evil, made the whole room go black. I only saw her like a cruel, wild animal thing, decoying and killing, and I shot her."

"I suppose the shock killed Johnathan?"

"Yes, it did; his heart was bad. It was awful, of course, to see his—to see her shot that way—his own daughter."

"What about Glover," Gaines asked.

"He came running out and faced me—went wild for a minute. We had a scrap, and I guess I laid him cold with a blow from the gun. Anyway, I realized that some one might drop in, so I stopped that cursed piano. I had started it to cover the sound of our voices, and I drew the curtains. Then I dumped Glover into the wine-cellar and, standing on the top step, drew Mary's dead body to me and hid it, just as I heard sounds at the rear door.

"It was locked, I knew, but I was so terrified at what I had done I hid down there myself while you two came in. I could hear you walking and occasionally the sound of your voices. When I decided you had gone out, or, rather, upstairs, I crawled out

and carried the old man down with the rest.

"Glover was coming out of it, but was badly dazed. I let him out the rear door and returned to see if I could remove any incriminating evidence, when I heard you coming down, and panic got the better of me. I ran, leaving the door open. Glover had driven away. I don't think he knew what he was doing. I caught up with him, got him to a doctor, and had a straight talk with him.

"I told him my side of it without trying to excuse myself, also that he stood as much chance of being blamed as I did. I knew his mother and I made him see the thing would kill her, and the result was he promised to keep still." He rose unsteadily. "Is there anything more you want to know?"

Gaines stood up. "I think not—at present."

We watched silently while Ault and Fleming made ready to leave. For my part, I could not bear the sight of the former's face and left the room. When I heard the outer door close I returned. Gaines was replacing the receiver.

"Your Glover is slightly improved; they think he has a fighting chance."

I sat down. Gaines started hunting the *one* pipe, failed to find it, contented himself with a cigarette, then I started in.

"What made you think it was Ault?"

"Largely hypothesis. I assumed he was, and tried him out; you know the rest."

"The woman who called?"

"Miss Gray? This morning I got in connection with the authorities at South Bend. They reported no such person as Lottie Shearer lived there. That was Mary's sister, you know.

"The note you found last night gave me the dope about Johnathan. It was from his daughter. I had no difficulty in tracing his record. He was a famous card sharp and confidence man twenty years ago, served time, and since getting out has kept within the law. But he and his daughter used the Jolly Jug as a convenient place to pick the gilded youth she snared."

We were silent a long time, then I remarked: "You know, Gaines, all these detective stories and all the plays you see show the criminal leaving something—the usual lock of hair, print or rubber heel, broken cuff-link and the like. I used to think that was put in for the convenience of the author. Now, supposing the murderer or robber didn't leave anything; not a clue, not a trace, not a single, solitary broken cuff-link, what would you fellows do?"

He yawned and started hunting his pipe. "Now, where is it, Carr, that worthless nigger—it was the one old Arse Chambers gave me that time up in Maine. The only one worth—oh, what's that you said? Supposing the criminal didn't leave anything?" He paused, turning the blackened pipe over in long, nervous fingers. "Well, that would be a pretty stiff one to solve, but the comforting thing is, Burton, my boy, and don't forget it, *they always do!*"

GET $40,000 FROM A MESSENGER

FIVE armed bandits shot and killed James Gorman, an American Railway Express messenger, seriously wounded Joseph Davis, a bank messenger, and escaped with a $40,000 payroll at a remote spot on the Cambria & Indiana Railway.

The bandits boarded a gasoline-propelled combination coach and took seats immediately behind the messengers. As the car neared a pass in the mountains they ordered the motorman to stop the car and opened fire on the messengers, killing Gorman and wounding Davis. They then gathered up two satchels containing the money and escaped in an automobine.

The payroll was for the miners of the Ebensburg Coal Company at Colver.

The Plot That Failed

By ERNEST A. PHILLIPS

CHAPTER ONE

JEFF CARSON, chief of detectives, squirmed back into a comfortable position in his big swivel chair as he read the afternoon mail.

He tore open the last letter, and it brought a sudden and unexpected emotion of rage.

Lifting his eyes from the smear, supposed to be the print of a bloody hand, Chief Carson again perused that mysterious letter:

Gilford, Neb., May 17, 19—.

JEFF CARSON, Chief of Detectives,
Central Station, City.

MY DEAR SIR: Do not disbelieve this note. Tonight promptly at the hour of ten, with the hands on the clock straight up, I am going to kill Henderson Buie. That's all.

The signature was in the form of a bloody imprint of a human hand. And as he sat there staring at that inhuman note, with its more so inhuman signature, Chief Carson tried to force a grim smile.

"Henderson Buie! Utterly preposterous!" grinned Chief Carson as he still held the note of warning before him.

Yet Carson unexpectedly discovered himself worried, for Henderson Buie was one of the most prominent men in Guilford, a wealthy dealer in diamonds, a man of achievement in the world.

The Chief relaxed and stretched his long legs out before him, pondering over the alarming situation. Buie, he knew, had recently returned from a long hunt in the wildest and most remote jungles of darkest Africa.

A single man was Buie, remembered Chief Carson; a man of forty-two years, smooth-faced, blue-eyed, brown-haired and possessed with the very noticeable refinement that surrounds a man of his standing in the community.

As he mulled the situation over in his mind, Chief Carson traced back into past years, when Henderson Buie first came to Guilford and opened up his elaborate diamond and jewelry establishment. At that time there was gossip about Buie, but it soon wilted down and met a natural death as he hastily, so it appeared, won his way into the smart set of the city.

In fact, as he remembered it now, Chief Carson had never liked Henderson Buie so very well.

The Chief glared at that bloody imprint again. Then he leaned over and pressed a buzzer button under the edge of his desk. Within a moment he was issuing orders.

"Send Cosgrove in here," he commanded, and the policeman withdrew.

Within a few moments Ben Cosgrove appeared.

"Examine this print thoroughly and let me know your findings, Ben," instructed Chief Carson. "Strictly confidential, you understand."

Cosgrove nodded as he accepted the queerly signed note and withdrew.

Chief Carson glanced at his watch. It was seven-fifteen. He glanced at the envelope the bloody note had been mailed in. The stamp showed the letter had been postmarked at five o'clock, which informed him it had been picked up in the four-thirty city collections, the last collection of mail to be made before the final at nine o'clock that night.

"No time to trace it down now," grumbled Chief Carson between tightened lips. "Besides, I believe it is the work of some

crank trying to have a little fun at the expense of the department. But even so, we have to take precaution, for if such a thing was to happen"—then he paused, finding himself almost trembling—"why, if the press ever learned we had received that notice beforehand and had not prevented the murder—whew!"

A rap sounded at the door.

"Come in!" the Chief growled, looking up anxiously.

Ben Cosgrove entered the room. "Peculiar, Chief," he started saying, then, lowering his voice, he made known his findings in his examination of a scientific nature.

A beam spread across Chief Carson's fat face, and he grinned like a child before a tree of new Christmas toys.

"Just what I thought," he exclaimed, heaving a heavy sigh. "I—the work of some nut, but just the sa——"

A hasty rap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in!" he barked.

Turning to look, he found Jimmy Guthrie, police reporter for the *Globe,* rushing excitedly into the office.

"Chief, did you—what's new tonight, anything?" Guthrie exploded nervously, as he eyed the Chief.

"Nothing now, Jim. Might be something later on," replied Carson. "We never know what darkness will bring."

"Well, look at this and see if it might develop—after darkness, as you say," rattled Guthrie, extracting a letter from his coat pocket and handing it to the Chief. "It just come in, Chief."

Carson, wondering, pulled a folded slip of paper out of the envelope and glanced at it.

The first thing his eyes found was the red imprint of a bloody hand.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN he glanced up Chief Carson wore a blank stare in his eyes. Without a word he placed the two notes side by side. They were written by the same person without a doubt.

At sight of the second bloody imprint Jimmy Guthrie stared.

"You got one, too?" he asked.

Chief Carson merely nodded, then, handing the note Guthrie had brought in to Cosgrove, he ordered him to make the same chemical investigation.

Cosgrove withdrew immediately.

"I thought that some joke when I first received it, Guthrie, but I'm beginning to believe there's some truth to it," said the Chief gravely. "If some nut was just trying to kid the department, why should he likewise send your paper the same thing?"

"But Henderson Buie, Chief; who'd knock him off?" asked Guthrie inquiringly as he knitted his thin brows. "He's the big gun of this city."

"That's the devil of it," was all Carson said, getting the last word out of his mouth just as Ben Cosgrove re-entered the office.

Jimmy Guthrie looked anxiously at the two men, who did not speak. He knew something had been discovered, but what?

Chief Carson instructed the switchboard operator to call every available plainclothes man to the station at nine o'clock sharp, and when that hour arrived Central station was the scene of considerable movement. Plainclothes men waited anxiously, wondering what assignment they were to receive.

At nine-ten Chief Carson, closely followed by Jimmy Guthrie, stepped out of his private office and into the assembly-room, where he faced the men.

Calling them together, he passed out the two notes that he and Guthrie had received that evening. "Read them carefully—they explain your work tonight," was all he said.

Instructions were issued, and a few moments later found the plainclothes men climbing into department automobiles that would whisk them to the scene of the predicted murder.

Guthrie climbed into the machine with Carson, much against the Chief's wishes.

"But, Chief," Guthrie had protested, his eyes blazing angrily, "it is the story of the year, man! I can't miss it—I've got to be right on the scene in case it happens!"

Carson mumbled some vague reply, and Guthrie hopped into the car.

Fifteen minutes later the Chief's machine was brought to a stop a block from the massive Henderson Buie mansion. Carson and Guthrie leaped out.

"Stay right here," commanded the Chief to the chauffeur.

Then they started up the quiet, dimly lighted street toward the wealthy man's residence, knowing that men in the other three cars had by this time gotten out at their designated points and were forming a circle about the big house.

Chief Carson had barely taken a dozen steps when his attention was attracted by the whirring of a hastily driven high-powered machine that drew up behind him. The Chief whirled about.

He saw a man jumping excitedly out of the car.

It was Henderson Buie!

The Chief turned and walked back, Jimmy Guthrie at his heels.

"Chief—I—well, it might be a joke, but it's a very—ah—disagreeable one if it is," hurriedly whispered Henderson Buie as he fumbled at his pockets. "I—look at this!"

Chief Carson accepted a piece of paper handed him. One glance was sufficient to explain, for there, at the bottom of the scribbled note, was the imprint of a bloody hand.

The Chief looked at Buie without speaking for several seconds.

"I just got it," Buie was explaining, taking his gold initialed cigarette from his mouth. "My butler handed it to me a few minutes ago. At first I wanted to ignore it. I—well, Chief, I get lots of such things in the course of a year; but this one seemed so strangely different, and—well, true. I hurried to the station; they told me you were on your way out here."

Chief Carson was dumbfounded, and Jimmy Guthrie gazed on in wonderment. There was Henderson Buie, the wealthy diamond dealer, standing before them. Guthrie glanced at his watch. It was nine-forty-five.

Fifteen more minutes to live—providing the writer of the baffling notes carried out his threats!

"Buie, who's after you, anybody?" sharply questioned the Chief.

The words evidently caught Henderson Buie unawares. He wavered a fraction of a second, and Chief Carson thought he noticed a strange flicker pass through those pale blue eyes.

"Nobody that I know of, Chief," came the choked reply. "I haven't an enemy in the world; at least I don't know why I should have any."

Chief Carson grunted.

"Then you're—you're not afraid to enter and be inside the house at ten o'clock?"

Another mysterious flicker seemed to flash into Henderson Buie's eyes.

"No, Chief; not with you and your staff of men here. In fact, since I learned you are here I have nothing more to fear," kept on Henderson Buie.

Chief Carson failed to acknowledge the compliment, and Buie, waving his arm as though to say he would face anything with the detective department at his side, paced up the street, turned into the concrete steps leading up to the long lawn that fronted his stately mansion, and entered.

Chief Carson glanced at his watch. It was nine-fifty-eight.

He whipped out his flashlight and cupped a palm over it, giving the button a slight press. A dim light flashed through his spread fingers for a split fraction of a second, then vanished as he lifted his thumb off the button.

A rustle in the brush to the left told Jimmy Guthrie that the signal sending the men up toward the house in preparation for any emergency that might arise had been flashed.

As they neared the big mansion Jimmy Guthrie felt his heart throb and pound. Suddenly the front door was flung open and a butler ran out upon the big porch, horror written across his face.

In a flash Chief Carson sprang from his place of concealment and darted to the porch, bounding up the concrete steps three at a time.

Grabbing the terror-stricken butler by the arm, Chief Carson looked into his ghastly

white face and demanded: "What has happened?"

"My master—Henderson Buie—has been murdered!" gasped the butler, stepping to one side as the Chief, followed by a number of his men, raced into the mansion.

Only Jimmy Guthrie remained outside. He could not bear to look at dead men.

Glancing at the butler's shoes, Guthrie darted inside the mansion, seeking a telephone. He rang up his editorial rooms and asked for City Editor Carl Tremain.

"It's me—Jim Guthrie, Carl. Henderson has just been murdered! What? Yes, I'm at the residence now, with the Chief. All right, soon as I get details I'll call."

When Guthrie left the telephone he found himself staring at Chief Carson. The Chief was shaking his head slowly.

"Those notes were true—he has been murdered."

But Jimmy Guthrie barely heard. He raced out upon the porch toward the butler, to learn all the details concerning the finding of the body. But when Guthrie stepped upon the porch the butler was gone.

CHAPTER THREE

THE fact that the butler had disappeared came as no surprise to Jimmy Guthrie. In fact, permitting a curious smile to form on his lips, Guthrie forgot the butler for the moment and turned to Carson.

"Chief, are you sure that Henderson Buie has been murdered?" he asked, squinting through narrowed eyes.

"Murdered? Yes. You saw him just a few minutes ago, didn't you?"

Guthrie hesitated a moment. He was thinking of the shoes he had noticed on the butler's feet, and of those he had seen on Buie's feet.

"What's eating you, Jim?" growled the Chief, evidently aggravated that such a question should be asked.

"Oh, nothing," shrugged Guthrie. "I'm going to look at that body. I hate to look at them—they make me sick. Bad dreams, Chief—awful."

Carson followed the reporter inside to the reception room and there, sprawled out across the floor, a rug upturned at a corner, the head crushed, lay the form of Henderson Buie.

The Chief issued orders instructing his men to their duty and sat down in a nearby chair.

Jimmy Guthrie took in the attire of the body at his feet. From necktie to belt buckle the body was dressed identically the same as that of Henderson Buie had been dressed; the features were without doubt those of the man who had stood before them less than five minutes ago, and yet——

Chief Carson got to his feet.

"Humph!" was all he grunted as he looked around with sharp, penetrating eyes. "A murder has been committed. The body of a dead man is found. The murderer has escaped and not a sign of an implement to show how the crime has been committed."

The words brought Jimmy Guthrie out of his trance with a start.

The only sign of a struggle was the upturned corner of the valuable rug, and a glance at the position of the body showed that the murderer probably had hidden behind the door and attacked his man.

The coroner was summoned, and his men ransacked the house in search of the missing butler. Chief Carson set about conducting his own investigation.

Guthrie started across the room to where Chief Carson was tinkering at a safe, when footsteps sounded behind him. He turned to look, and there, in the doorway, stood the missing butler!

"You!" choked Guthrie in surprise. Glancing at the shoes he wore, Guthrie saw they were different from the ones he had on out on the front porch.

"Lord, man, why don't you cover that ghostly face?" breathed the butler, putting his hands before his eyes. "It will always haunt me. And he was such a good master!"

Inviting the butler into the room and closing the door behind him, Chief Carson faced him.

"Sit down and tell me everything you

know about him," said the Chief, pointing to the murdererd man.

"Well, Mr. Buie had just telephoned to have his full dress suit ready for to-night, sir," started the butler.

"What is your name?" demanded the Chief, glaring accusingly at the man, who displayed surprise at the question.

"Why—why, George Turner, sir." The reply was stammered.

"All right; proceed." Chief Carson relaxed with the words.

"When Mr. Buie got home there was a letter for him. I gave it to him. He read it. The letter upset him. He left without a word, ordering his machine and chauffeur."

"About what time was that?" cut in the Chief.

"Only—less than thirty minutes before I—found him dead, sir."

"Where did he go in his car?"

The butler hesitated. "I do not know, sir. He never told me."

"What time did he get back here?"

"Well, I didn't see him any more—alive. I found him dead, sir, murdered, right there where his body lies now."

"Where were you when Henderson Buie was murdered?" thundered the Chief, shifting his voice until it was now cold and icy, almost threatening.

"Upstairs, sir. I was in my own room."

"Heard no noise whatsoever? Just happened downstairs, walked into this room and found him dead? Is that it, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

The Chief paused and rubbed his hands together.

"Who opened that safe?" growled the Chief, pointing toward the little safe in the corner.

At sight of the open safe the butler showed amazement.

"The diamonds!" he almost yelled. "Are they gone?"

Chief Carson was on his feet.

"The safe is empty," he calmly returned.

George Turner threw his hands to his face. "My master put diamonds valued at fifty thousand dollars into that safe just this afternoon."

Fifty thousand dollars in diamonds missing! Jimmy Guthrie whistled in surprise. Here was a new angle to his story, something around which to weave the murder.

Chief Carson merely smiled and failed to register surprise at the statement of the butler.

"Turner, how did you know those diamonds were in that safe?" he demanded.

"My master told me to put them in there, sir," came the reply without a waver.

Chief Carson was going to ask another question, but a rap at the closed door interrupted.

Guthrie stepped across the room and opened the door.

Dr. A. R. Timmerman, county coroner, entered, ahead of Ben Cosgrove.

CHAPTER FOUR

"SO Henderson Buie is murdered?" remarked the surprised coroner. "I could barely believe it when I heard the news."

Guthrie looked at the coroner queerly. Dr. A. R. Timmerman, he knew, was something of a fanatic on criminal work. In the past he had cleared up a number of crimes by using a mysterious medicine of his own invention which later staggered the medical world when he finally gave out full information concerning it.

"There's the lay of the land, Doc," ventured Carson; "but if you don't mind, let my man Cosgrove examine that blood."

Doctor Timmerman stooped down over the body, looking at it strangely. At last he straightened.

"Not human blood at all, Chief," he exclaimed. "It's ox blood!"

"And it was with ox blood that the imprints of a human hand were placed on those warning notes," Chief Carson responded.

Jimmy Guthrie stiffened and his face was drawn. Ox blood! Not human blood! Then——

He looked at the butler. George Turner was holding a handkerchief at his face,

his head lowered. This struck Guthrie as being peculiar, but he ventured to say nothing. There was something queer about that butler, resolved Guthrie.

"The body, Doc, is Henderson's?" demanded the Chief.

The coroner gave the body a shove and rolled it partially over.

"Might be. Looks enough like him. What time was he murdered?"

"Ten sharp, Doc."

The coroner looked at his watch. It was ten-thirty.

"Impossible, Chief. That body is cold, and it has been dead several hours!"

"But I was talking to Henderson Buie less than an hour ago!" said the Chief.

The butler, starting toward a door leading into a connecting room, was halted, and, before he realized it, a volatile vapor was entering his nostrils, and Coroner Timmerman had both his hands clamped about the man's head.

Chief Carson and Guthrie looked on in amazement, while Ben Cosgrove smiled at the queer act.

Within a moment George Turner was unconscious—chloroformed!

"There's your man, Chief, or at least one of them," advised the physician. "Now, tell me what all this foolishness is about, so I can get to work and solve this puzzle."

"We received three notes telling us the murder was to be committed at ten o'clock sharp, Doc. I got one, Henderson Buie got one, and Guthrie here, of the *Globe,* also received one. Here they are," and he handed the physician the three notes.

The coroner gave them a glance, a faint smile showing as he fastened his eyes upon the imprints of the human hand.

"At first I thought it a joke. Then Guthrie showed me his. I had Cosgrove examine mine and he said the blood was not human blood, but the blood of an animal, a cow, perhaps.

"It struck me funny at the time; but I get so many of those notes from nuts, Doc, that it keeps me guessing. If I ignore one of them, something is liable to happen, while I might run down a hundred and find them written by some boob.

"I got my men together and we surrounded the house. At a few minutes before ten Henderson Buie drove up and showed me the note he had also received. It was the same as ours, the same handwriting and the same paper—and the same ox blood imprint. He said he would not be afraid to enter the house with us around.

"He went inside at nine-fifty-eight, and at ten sharp he was murdered."

"How do you know he was murdered?" queried the physician.

"The butler rushed out and told us."

"Humph! Strange case. But come, help me lift this butler up on the settee."

Surrounding the unconscious form, it was lifted on the settee.

"Anything missing to make murder necessary, Chief?" asked the physician, as he opened a little medicine case.

"Fifty thousand dollars in diamonds."

"Who said so?"

"The butler."

"We'll see in a minute," was all the doctor replied as he lifted a few small bottles filled with serum from his case and set them on a center table within easy reach.

Extracting a hypodermic needle, the coroner filled the container and after dabbing a circle of iodine on a part of the forearm, he pinched it up with his thumb and forefinger, gave the needle a sharp harpoon-like throw and sunk it into the butler's arm. Pressing the cap slowly, he injected the serum under the victim's skin.

Then he extracted the needle and laid it aside.

"It'll take that injection a few minutes to contract the synapses, or what you would call the couplings of the nervous system. Soon as the circuit has been broken, so to speak, we'll see what we can learn."

The men gazed on in wonderment. Ben Cosgrove pulled part of the rug across the dead body and covered it.

Doctor Timmerman, puffing at a big cigar, remained silent several moments. At last he felt the pulse of the unconscious butler.

"Where are those diamonds?" he suddenly barked, stooping down to speak into the ear of the man.

The Chief frowned at the words. A second passed. No reply.

"Where are those diamonds?" again demanded the physician.

The men waited breathlessly. And then the unconscious form whispered: "He has them, sir."

"Who?" instantly asked the doctor.

"Henderson Buie," came the surprising but calm reply.

"Where is Henderson Buie?" the coroner growled firmly.

"Hidden in a secret basement downstairs."

"There, Chief, your case is solved. Henderson Buie has not been murdered. He is still in this house. Get your men into action."

But before the Chief could move the door was forced open and handcuffed between two men was Henderson Buie, the wealthy diamond dealer.

"Just found him, Chief," exclaimed one of the detectives. "He was in the cellar in a secret compartment."

"Whose body is that here on the floor?" barked the coroner at the still form of the butler.

"I do not know, sir. My master obtained it from a medical college," came the astonishing reply.

Henderson Buie gave a spring, but the steel bracelets around his wrist held him fast.

The doctor spoke to the butler again. "Where was Henderson Buie going?"

"Back to Africa."

"That's a lie!" shouted the man between the two detectives.

"Shut up!" came a command from one of the men holding him.

"That's the end of the case," chuckled Doctor Timmerman. "Quite interesting, wasn't it? Buie probably needed cash. He steals fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds after having them heavily insured. Then he buys a corpse resembling himself from the medical college, hammers up the face beyond recognition, places the body in the room here, attired in the same clothing he himself was wearing when you last saw him, obtained a half gallon of ox blood at the packing-house, pours it over the dead man and leaves the impression that he has been murdered. He writes those notes himself to make it convincing. Next he evaporates from the scene and hides in the basement. After a few days, he would hie himself out and hit the trail for Africa again, having the diamonds and insurance money in his possession. The medical college body is buried. His debtors come and close his store, finding nothing in stock of any value and, as he is dead, they cannot collect."

"But this mansion, Doc?" asked the Chief, unable to believe it all.

"Pshaw, Chief; didn't you know? It is only leased."

The doctor picked up his case and gave the form of George Turner a quick jerk. The butler sleepily opened his eyes, staring wonderingly about.

Then he saw Henderson Buie! The butler shrank back in astonishment.

"Just as well arrest him, too, Chief, as an associate in the swindle," advised the physician. "He knew what was being done, and probably would have joined Buie later."

A few sharp commands and the two men were being led toward the machine that would take them to Central station.

Jimmy Guthrie stepped up to the butler and asked: "Those shoes? Why did you change them?"

"They hurt my feet," was all the butler had to say.

Then Guthrie turned to the physician. But Chief Carson was already inquiring about the mysterious serum.

"Why, it's my truth serum, Chief," the coroner chuckled. "I have been years in perfecting it. I decided it would work in criminal investigations, so decided to make a few tests. I did. They were successful, as you probably learned tonight.

"It's real name is scopolamin, Chief," went on the physician. "When the butler comes to he will not remember what he said, but we had four witnesses in the room, and they should satisfy the most hardened jury, shouldn't they?"

Laughing, the physician packed up his case, folded and snapped it shut and departed.

The Man in the Vault

By RALPH NORTHROP

PATROLING the corner in front of the First National Bank of Exter, Night Watchman Bryant heard a shot.

On this night the usual quiet prevailed up to ten o'clock. Once or twice Bryant had peered through the barred glass of the windows. As usual the night lights inside the building were burning brightly, and there was no one in sight.

When he heard the shot the surprise of it seemed to stun him, but only for a moment. He ran down the steps of the bank entrance to look down Main street, then down Mason street. He had not believed for a moment that the sound had come from inside the bank.

But there was nobody in sight in either street, no indication of trouble. In an instant Bryant was at the nearest window and was surveying the interior of the bank. The lights were undisturbed, and he saw nobody.

As he blew his whistle he touched the concealed button beneath the stone window ledge that started all the burglar alarms ringing. Almost immediately the lone policeman who had been patroling the central part of the town was on the scene. Five other officers came dashing down Main street in the police department's automobile to answer the alarm. The bank was surrounded, and if the shot had been fired inside the building the man who had fired it was trapped.

"Sure you heard a shot?" one of the policemen asked Bryant.

"I am that! I haven't lost my hearin'," Bryant snapped in reply.

"Anybody been hanging around the bank tonight?"

"Not with me on the job at the corner," Bryant said.

"You've boasted a million times, Bryant, that nobody could get into the bank at night without you seeing them."

"A man is a fool to boast," Bryant said. "Suppose we go inside and look things over?"

"Can you get inside?"

"I can," said Bryant. "I have the keys to the big front doors to be used in case of emergency."

Two officers were assigned to remain outside and guard all possible avenues of escape while the other three with the night watchman entered the building.

Police Captain Havens, with whom Bryant had been talking, gently thrust the watchman aside and led the way. Bryant and the two policemen, their weapons held ready for instant use, followed at the captain's heels.

Through the lobby they went and around to the little gateway that led to the interior. There was no one in sight. Carefully they searched every possible hinding-place. There were few corners into which a man might creep. It took the officers less than five minutes to make sure that there was nobody there. They went back to the entrance.

No one had left the building; the two policemen outside were sure of that. Bryant still declared that he had heard a shot.

"Sounds fishy," Captain Havens declared. "If there's anybody in the bank building he must be in one of the vaults. He couldn't hide anywhere else. Who is the nearest official who can open them."

"Mr. Evans, the cashier," Bryant answered. "He lives on Baker avenue about six blocks out. He can open the vaults

where they keep the books and papers and such, and the one where some of the money is kept to be used first thing in the morning. But even Mr. Evans can't open the big vault where the real stuff is piled in rows. There's a time-lock on that one."

"We'll get Evans," the Captain said.

The police car sped away for the cashier, and the officers guarded the entrance of the building where the front door still remained unlocked. A small crowd had gathered, but the officers forced them away from the corner. Twenty minutes later the cashier was on the scene.

Evans smiled when the situation was explained to him in detail by Captain Havens.

"Bryant, you have been hearing things," he said.

He opened the first vault, and they found it empty except for piles of dusty ledgers and records. Another was opened, but nobody was found inside. The cashier went to the one remaining vault that could be opened at that hour.

"How could a man crawl in here, lock himself in from the outside, and then fire a shot that could be heard away out in the street?" Evans wanted to know, smiling at Bryant again.

"I heard that shot, sir," Bryant declared. "I'm bettin' that it was from inside the bank."

The cashier smiled again as he began working the combination. Captain Havens, Bryant and another officer stood behind him, their weapons held ready.

Evans opened the door. An incandescent light inside the vault flashed into life. Those at the door saw a man stretched on the floor.

The officers sprang aside instinctively and thrust their guns forward. The form on the floor did not stir. Cautiously, wondering what it might mean, fearing a trick of some sort, Captain Havens bent and touched the man on the shoulder. There was no response.

"Dead!" Havens exclaimed. "Shot through the head. Look at the red pool on the floor—that tells the story."

"And take a look at this," Night Watchman Bryant added.

Near the body was a small black bag containing a kit of burglar's tools. The dead man wore rubber gloves. In his hip-pocket was an undischarged revolver, the only weapon the man had.

"Couldn't have been suicide," Havens declared. "He's a robber, and I'll bet we'll find he has a record. But how did he get inside this vault?"

The cashier had been making a further investigation.

"Fifty thousand dollars for the payroll of the Exter Paper Company is missing," he said. "I placed it in the vault myself the last thing yesterday afternoon. The company always gets its payroll money as soon as the bank opens."

CHAPTER TWO

DETECTIVE GEORGE BARDEN, of the Boston Police Department, was on the ground in Exter at eight o'clock next morning. There was a special reason why Barden had been sent down by the chief of the bureau in the city. The strange case in Exter gave promise of leading to the solving of some of the recent cases about Boston.

For some time Barden had been conducting a campaign against a band of clever criminals known as the Wilkens gang, and he suspected that the gang might have had a hand in this case.

Exter's Chief of Police was only too glad to turn everything over to Detective George Barden.

Barden decided that if the Wilkens gang was responsible for the Exter crime they had outdone themselves. The Wilkinses were three brothers, who had been operating almost in open defiance of the police.

Going over the ground carefully with Captain Havens and Night Watchman Bryant, Barden was unable to adduce any facts which did not add to the puzzling features of the case.

He asked many questions, but could make no headway in establishing what he had hoped to establish—that somebody had escaped from the building after the shot had

been fired. Bryant had watched the two sides of the building, and the two other sides were firewalls, innocent of door or window.

If nobody had left the building there were but three possible answers to the puzzle. The dead man might have committed suicide or shot himself accidentally, the murderer might have left by way of the ceiling to the roof, or he might still be in the bank building.

These conjectures Barden proceeded to eliminate in order. If the man had shot himself he would have been unable to close the vault afterward, and the sharpness of the report that Bryant had heard meant that the door of the vault had been open when the shot was fired. Furthermore, the revolver of the dead man did not show that it had been discharged.

The detective examined the ceiling and found it was solid, glazed plaster. Again the interior of the bank was searched, and even the walls back of the radiators were examnied. No man could be hiding in the building.

There was but one tangible clew which Detective Barden could work—the slain man. Prints were taken of the dead man's fingers, but they were not duplicated by anything on record in the Boston bureau, as Barden soon learned by telegraphing the formula. Barden's next step was to wire to Leavenworth, the national fingerprint clearing-house. If there were no duplicates in Leavenworth the slain man was not a criminal of record anywhere in the country.

The vault itself yielded no prints of value, although all possible traces were developed and photographed. These turned out to be marks left by regular employees of the bank, and by some of the officers at the time the vault was opened the night before. Obviously the robbers had taken precautions with gloves to leave no prints.

It was not until the fingerprint work had been concluded that Barden gave permission to the bank officials to have the vault cleaned up and the stains removed. Allen Warner, president of the bank, arrived while this work was in progress. In the confusion he had not been informed of the robbery and murder. The head of the institution betrayed much astonishment at the news of what had happened.

The detective walked to the lobby and strolled back and forth, his keen eyes alert for anything, anywhere, that might be slightly unusual. Then he returned to the vault where the red stain had been removed. He examined the ceiling, the walls, and the floor. Finally his eyes rested on a spot in the center of the vault. He hurried to President Warner, whose office was at the other end of the building.

"I would like to know the name of the contractors who built this bank," Barden requested.

"Bowes and Dearling," the banker informed him. "We have been using this new building only a little more than a year."

"Thank you, sir," Barden said.

He hurried to a telephone, and talked with the office of the contracting firm. In half an hour a little man in working togs entered and asked for Barden.

"I guess that I'm the fellow you want, sir," he said. "I'm the man who bossed the tile job in this building."

"You're the man," Barden said, leading him into the vault. "Now, tell me something. Why did you make that center group of tile figures open at the left, when all the other groups in the floor open to the right?"

"My men never laid those tile that way," the foreman declared. "Think that I'd stand for a job like that? That's been tampered with, some way."

"Tear it up," Detective Barden ordered.

The foreman obtained a chisel, inserted it between two of the tile patterns, and lifted one of the plates off its concrete base. He put the end of the chisel under the next square, and the chisel struck wood instead of cement.

"Off with it, man," Barden ordered.

The man bent to his work. A trapdoor, topped with patterns of tile, was lifted out of the floor of the vault!

CHAPTER THREE

"THAT was a mighty good piece of work, laying the pattern on a wooden base," the mason declared. "The thing they didn't figure on was that there are two tile patterns that look slightly alike and are really exactly different. I'll say you have a good eye, sir."

Barden found that for a distance of five feet the hole beneath the trap-door went straight down, and was about three feet in diameter. Then it branched off into a narrow passageway large enough for a man to crawl through.

In this dark, underground tunnel, the detective worked his way cautiously, deciding against a light. For thirty feet he wormed his way through the damp earth. A few feet more and the passageway ended suddenly against a boarded wall.

His ear close to what resembled a wooden door, Barden waited. For fully ten minutes he listened, but not the faintest sound did he hear. Feeling along the edge of the boards Barden's fingers rested on a small hinge. He hunted for a latch on the other side, but there was none. Then he pushed carefully against the partition. It did not yield. Once more he shoved at it, and when he let go the door sprang back toward him on a rebound. It was unlocked, and opening in on the tunnel side.

Against the wooden partition stood a large piano box. A faint ray of light trickled in at the edge. Pushing against this obstacle, the detective found that it yielded. He squeezed himself silently out along the side of the box and found himself in a small warehouse.

It was rather dark. A door opening into a storeroom of some kind in front was securely locked and bolted. Forcing up a boarded window in the rear of the room, Barden fixed the location of the door from the areaway adjoining the bank building. Then he started back.

Replacing the piano-box he closed the wooden door, and left it exactly as he had found it. Next he crawled back through the damp tunnel and out into the bank vault, where President Warner, Cashier Evans and the tileman were waiting. Giving orders that the vault should be closed until further notice, Barden took Captain Havens and two of his men to the building adjoining the bank to which the tunnel had led.

This building, which faced on Franklin Avenue, was a long, three-story brick structure, with several stores on the ground floor. But the particular store that Barden wanted to see was a small, narrow room on the first floor, immediately adjacent to the bank. It was occupied by a coffee and tea establishment, but, although it was still early in the afternoon, there was no sign of life about the place.

Trying the door, the detective found that it was locked. The tea and coffee house evidently was not open for business. The four officers forced the door and entered, prepared for an attack.

"Gone," said Barden a few minutes later. "This store was only a blind. And since they got away with fifty thousand dollars, and killed one of their pals, we may have a long chase."

The detective, leaving two men on guard, hurried to the office of the agents of the building, where he got descriptions of the two men who had rented the place. These descriptions tallied perfectly with two of the three men for whom the Boston police had been looking for months. They were the Wilkens brothers.

From other tenants Barden learned that the tea and coffee house had been opened about three weeks before. Nothing unusual had been noticed about the place until it had been closed two days previously. It had not been reopened since.

Further questions brought forth the fact that more bags of coffee were hauled away from the store than had been seen going into it. Detective Barden knew then how the earth from the tunnel had been removed.

"It has all the marks of a Wilkens job," he told Captain Havens, as he walked with the latter down the street toward the telegraph office.

He wanted his reply from Leavenworth,

and found it waiting for him. The fingerprints of the slain man found in the vault were on record. They were those of a certain "Red" Hogan, a notorious criminal of Boston, who had served two terms for burglary and who had finally escaped from prison. The Leavenworth authorities gave the further information that Hogan had escaped with a youth named James Taylor, a first-time offender. A description of Taylor had been sent.

Barden read this description carefully.

"James Taylor," he reflected. "I think I know him as John Teller."

He telephoned Boston to ask that the dragnet be thrown out for his man. But the dragnet was unnecessary. To Barden came one of those accidents that happen at times, and often are puzzling. While at the depot, ready to return to Boston and take up the chase of the Wilkens gang, the officer met James Taylor face to face.

"I want you," Barden said. "The bank job, you know."

"What bank job?" Taylor asked.

"And for murder," Barden added, watching his man carefully.

He expected some move from Taylor as he spoke, but none came. The youth looked at him sullenly, and then hung his head.

"Old stuff," he said. "I might as well admit you've got me, but not for murder. I've been double-crossed, that's all. I'm sore. Take me along. I'm ready to squeal. But you'll never hang a murder on me."

"We'll go up to Police Headquarters, where you can talk as long as you please," Barden said. "And the straighter you talk the better it will be for you."

"I'll begin now," said his prisoner, as they walked up the street. "I've been double-crossed by men who said they were my pals. I've been in some tight places with "Red" Dugan, but I never doped it that he'd turn out a welcher."

"Then why stick to him?"

"I won't," the prisoner said. "I got wise to this little job of the Wilkens gang by accident. Hogan and I had a room on Cambridge Street in Boston. Two weeks ago we learned that the Wilkenses were bunked in the next room."

"That's interesting," said Barden. "Go on with you story."

"Hogan and me knew the Wilkenses wouldn't let us in on anything, so we decided to get a line on some of their fancy stuff. Night after night we took turns lying flat on our faces by the door between the two rooms. And finally one night one of the Winkenses dropped something about their coffee store down here in Exter. The next day Hogan and me came down here.

"We found the coffee house, all right, and we saw Pete Wilkens dealing out a little coffee for a few customers that happened in. And then by listening we found out about the tunnel job. Those sacks of supposed coffee didn't fool me any at all.

"Back in Boston we took turns again listening at the door. We got only a word or two; the Wilkenses were not loud talkers, but it was enough to tell us that the tunnel was ready. We decided to beat the Wilkenses to it, and grab off the coin in the bank for ourselves. So we came back.

"We managed to get into that coffee store right after dark. We figured that we could get through with the job and be done before the Wilkenses arrived, because it was certain they would wait until after midnight. We found the tunnel, and Hogan took the lead. I stood on guard at the store end.

"After exploring things, Hogan came back and said that it was the prettiest job he ever had seen. The tunnel went right into the cash vault through a trapdoor all covered with floor tile. The way things had been showed that the Wilkenses intended to make more than one visit to the bank. I told Hogan to hustle back and grab everything in the money line that he could carry, and I would stand guard at the other end of the tunnel.

"He went back, and he wasn't gone more than five minutes when I heard a shot, muffled like, at the vault end. I knew Hogan must have run into some guy in the bank and plugged him. I hurried through the tunnel to the other end, to help out if he needed me.

"Just as I got by the trapdoor Hogan dropped down from the vault in the dark

with a bundle that I supposed was coin. 'Beat it quick,' I told him, 'and I'll shove back the trapdoor to keep anybody from following. You wait for me in the coffee store.'

"I shoved the door up into place, put the posts under it, and crawled back through the tunnel to the coffee-house. I was just in time to see Hogan leave the place, and when I whistled to him he kept right on going. As he rounded the corner he broke into a run and gave me the slip in a dark alley. That's how I was double-crossed, if you want to know it."

Detective Barden chewed his cigar.

"Pretty good story," he remarked.

"It's the truth, all right."

Barden sensed that it was. His man was telling the truth as far as he knew it. But he was off on one point—it had not been "Red" Hogan who had dropped down from the vault and had hurried away with the money.

"Before I take you the rest of the way to Headquarters I want to show you something," Barden said. He had stopped before an undertaking establishment. "I want you to look at the man who was shot last night."

He forced his prisoner to go inside, and they followed an attendant into the morgue. The prisoner gave a cry of surprise, while Barden watched him closely.

"Hogan!" he exclaimed. "They got 'Red' Hogan! And I've been thinkin' he double-crossed me. Who was the guy that croaked him? Who shot my pal?"

"That is what I am trying to learn," Barden said. "Instead of Hogan and you beating the Wilkenses to it, it seems that they beat you to it."

A live clue at last, Barden thought. The Wilkenses had robbed the bank, and catching "Red" Hogan there had murdered him for his attempt at underworld treachery.

Barden put his man in jail, and then called Boston over the telephone to say that he had caught his man in Exter. And then he got a shock, and saw his clue disappear into thin air.

"You can count the Wilkenses out of it," the Boston office told him. "Evidently they didn't intend to pull off the Exter job until later. All three of the Wilkens brothers were caught last night trying to crack a safe in a little town two hundred miles north. A town constable nabbed them. What do you think of that? No, there is no mistake, Barden. The men have been brought here for safe-keeping, and I've talked to them."

CHAPTER FOUR

DETECTIVE BARDEN spent a sleepless night in his room. Behind the drawn curtains he sat propped up in his chair, heedless of the fact that the steam in the radiators had been turned off, and consuming a fresh cigar every half-hour; at other times he paced the floor, trying to solve the perplexing riddle with which he found himself confronted.

Long before midnight Barden confessed to himself that he was about where he had started. The Wilkenses were eliminated, though they had constructed the tunnel and had intended to rob the bank. Being jailed by a country officer two hundred miles away at the time the Exter crime was committed was alibi enough even for the notorious Wilkenses.

The one clue that remained might develop in the morning with an expected telegram, but Detective Barden was not depending on it.

When he met Captain Havens, Night Watchman Bryant and the other police officers early the next morning, he went over the whole thing again with them. Each man's recital was exactly as he had given it on the day previous. President Warner seemed to be greatly agitated over the loss of the fifty thousand dollars.

"Of course, I am no detective," the president said, "but it seems to me that you have all the clue you need. You found a tunnel to the vault, found one dead burglar, caught his confederate, and have the latter in jail. It looks to me like a plain case of one crook slaying another, possibly in a quarrel over a division of the spoils."

"Possibly," Barden replied, "you do not know crooks very well. I have had a talk with the man in jail. Long experience enables me to read the mind of a crook pretty well and to weigh what he says for truth or fiction. James Taylor did not kill his pal in the vault—of that I am sure."

"Well, I'm sure I can't help you."

"Then I'll be moving along—you are a busy man. By the way, if you are going to be here about four o'clock I'll drop in on you and we'll consider half a clue I have in mind."

"Very well, Mr. Barden. I'll be here at four o'clock today."

The detective left the office. A moment later President Warner's secretary opened the door suddenly, and the banker started.

"Oh, it is you, Miss Trent," he said. "The loss of that money has made me nervous. I don't seem to be able to get down to business."

The secretary smiled and put some letters before him. The banker reached for them, and the girl turned toward the door.

"Miss Trent," Warner called after her, "have you taken my letter opener?"

"No, Mr. Warner."

"That's strange. I cannot find it anywhere," he said.

He hunted with the secretary, but without success. The girl went to her own office, and President Warner attended to his mail. He was a busy man until Detective Barden appeared at four o'clock.

"Mr. Warner, I've been trying to patch up that half-clue I said that I had in mind," Barden reported. "And I am here now to say that I have discovered the identity of the robber and murderer."

"You have?" Warner cried.

"Yes," Barden replied, taking the chair at the end of the desk. "Want to hear about it?"

"Naturally," the president answered.

"Very well. I have been waiting for a telegram on the chance that it might contain what we call a live clue. I received the message soon after leaving you. To start at the beginning, James Taylor, the man in jail, told a circumstantial story about the robbery with a confederate, 'Red' Hogan, the man found dead in the vault. He told a true story of what happened as far as he knew. But he failed to throw light on the identity of the real murderer, because the man who committed the crime and got away with the money was as much a mystery to him as to me. James Taylor, you see, let him slip through the tunnel in the dark, under the impression that he was 'Red' Hogan.

"Now, what I have told nobody in town is this—that I found a glove in that tunnel the first time I went through it."

"A glove!" Warner exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. This glove I packed carefully in cotton and had sent to the identification bureau in Boston on the chance that something might come of it. On my suggestion the fingers of the glove were turned inside-out. The material being leather, I assumed that there was a slight chance of there being enough of a fingerprint on the inside of one of the fingers to give me a clue."

The banker laughed dryly.

"That sounds like the wild dream of a fiction detective."

"I'll admit that it does," said Barden. "But it turned out better than I expected. On the left ring finger of the leather glove the identification bureau found a trace of oily secretion from the pores of the murderer's finger, and by developing it with powder they discovered a pattern with a clearly defined core and delta. It was the only one of all the fingers that showed anything at all. But it was enough."

"You interest me," the banker said.

"I wired the formula to Leavenworth after finding no record of a duplicate in the Boston bureau," Barden continued. "On the reply received from Leavenworth depended my chance of identifying the man who wore the glove—the robber and the murderer. That is the telegram for which I have been waiting. And it brought news that the man's print was on record, and gave me his name."

"Who is he?" the banker demanded.

"His name is Arthur Kendall, formerly of Forth Worth, Texas."

"Kendall," the banker repeated. "Kendall?"

"Kendall," said Detective Barden emphatically.

"But, supposing that this strange story is true, what good is it unless you find this Kendall and arrest him for the crime?"

"That is one part of the clew that I patched up since I left you," Barden retorted. "As you say, the thing now is to capture Kendall."

The banker's secretary tapped on the door, entered and announced that Captain Havens was waiting.

"Just in time, Captain," Detective Barden said. "I am about to tell the story of what happened in the bank the night of the robbery. In the first place, a sharp, distinct report of a gun was heard by the night watchman. That meant only one thing—the shot must have been fired either in the big room or the open vault. In either event the vault was open, because the shot could not have been fired through the vault door. And it couldn't have been fired in the closet vault and let out a distinct report. Since it is not customary for banks, even in small towns, to allow their vaults to stand open after business hours, it is evident that the vault was opened during the evening, undoubtedly just before the robbery."

"Of course!" President Warner exclaimed "The two crooks opened it."

"But there were more than two crooks," Barden declared. "And the vault, as we all know, was opened without the use of explosives or tools of any kind."

President Warner began to show some excitement.

"You mean——"

"I mean," Detective Barden continued, "that the vault was not opened from the inside by either 'Red' Hogan or James Taylor. The door was opened from the outside, and by somebody in the bank."

"But," the banker expostulated, "the police found no one in the bank—and no one left the building."

"Which made the case look extremely difficult at first," Barden said. "It is true that there were burglar tools in the vault, but there was not a scratch on the metal anywhere. No tools were used either on the inside or outside."

"Then——"

"Since the door of the vault was not opened forcibly, and since it was opened from the outside, it could have been opened only by some one who knew the combination."

"That is rather a reckless deduction," President Warner said.

"Not at all. I understand that only two men knew the combination."

"Mr. Evans knew it," the banker said.

"And you knew it."

"Yes, of course."

"Now we are getting nearer to the point," Barden went on. "While the burglar tools were not used to open the vault, they were brought into the bank for that purpose. The man who opened the vault came here with the intention of robbing the bank to get money to cover dishonest stock gambling and speculations. But he did not want it to appear that way, of course. He wanted it to look like a genuine robbery."

"Isn't that rather preposterous?" Warner asked.

"And," Barden resumed, "this man came into the bank wearing gloves. He was an amateur, or he would have known that he should wear rubber gloves instead of leather. The leather was his undoing.

"It was his plan, I feel sure, to go inside the vault after he had opened it with the combination, and then to close the door a part of the way to hide himself and the sound from the street. Then he was going to use the tools to make it appear like a genuine robbery. He intended taking the fifty thousand dollars and slipping out the Mason Street door while the watchman was on the Main Street side of the building."

President Warner raised a hand in protest.

"Mr. Barden, this sounds like a bit of comedy deduction," he said. "One would think that you had been in the lobby of the bank watching the affair."

"I hardly deserve the compliment," the detective replied coldly. "Getting back to what happened, the man opened the door

of the vault as he had planned. Then he saw something that he had not anticipated. 'Red' Hogan had come up through the trapdoor in the tile floor. The robber in the vault was as much surprised as the man on the outside. He thought that he had been caught by an officer. He reached for his gun. But the other man beat him to it—and shot him.

"And when the shot rang out it gave an alarm that the man who had opened the vault had not figured on. With the dead man at his feet and the trapdoor open he had a chance for escape. He grasped the only chance remaining for a get-away. He took the bundle of money, dropped it into the hole and went into the tunnel.

"When he went down the hole he ran into another surprise—another man waiting in the passageway. But when this man, thinking that he was Hogan, told him to keep on going, it was easy."

"Sounds like fiction," the banker observed.

"But it is not. Would you like to know the name of the murderer?"

"I suppose you mean Evans, my cashier?"

"No, sir," said Detective Barden. "The murderer and robber was Allen Warner, alias Arthur Kendall, formerly of Fort Worth, Texas."

The bank president, trembling in mingled fear and rage, sprang to his feet.

"What's the proof of all this?" he demanded.

"Do you deny it?"

"Of course I deny it. You are trying to frighten and blackmail me by making wild guesses about the entire affair."

"In my investigations I have learned a few things about your trouble with the bank examiner, and your fliers in stocks," Barden said quietly. "I did not assume too much, but I did keep my eyes open. And when I talked with you a few hours ago I noticed something about one of the little buttons on the right sleeve of your coat."

Warner jerked the sleeve quickly before him and looked down at the buttons.

"Just a little yellow clay packed into the holes of the button," Barden went on. "The remainder of your suit shows no trace of your escape by crawling through the tunnel."

"So that is what you call a clue, is it?" the banker asked, trying to laugh.

"Just one of the scraps of a clue that I patched together," Barden replied. "Also, I borrowed your metal letter opener, and it did not take long to find that the fingerprint pattern found in the glove was yours."

The banker sprang to his feet.

"You've got me!" he exclaimed. "It is true enough. But at least give me credit for one thing, Detective Barden—I know that I'm licked."

BURGLAR FREED THROUGH SOFT-HEARTEDNESS

MRS. SAMUEL ZINNER was awakened recently in her apartment in Brooklyn by some one rummaging in the next room. When she investigated a man going through a desk straightened up and grappled with her.

He threw Mrs. Zinner down and ran out. At the front door he met her husband. Zinner seized him and dragged him back to the apartment. It was found that $200 was missing from the desk. The intruder gave it back and said he had been driven to burglary by the illness of his mother.

Having got the $200 back, the Zinners' hearts were softened and they let the man go. Detectives Greco and Baker, whom neighbors had called, were told which way he had fled and found him later trying to get into a house three blocks away.

The prisoner said he was Nathan Srebnik of Manhattan. In his pockets were found three watches, and a ring which belonged to persons who rent rooms from the Zinners. This caused them to have another change of heart and make a complaint against him.

The Hidden Flame

By LEWIS H. KILPATRICK

I THOUGHT that I knew Bruce Maxwell about as intimately as a bachelor of forty-five can know another who is fifteen years his junior; but not until a certain evening at Montpensier's did I begin to discover those depths in him which his quiet, New England-born manner concealed.

His fiancée, Carol Alden, was out of town, and seeing that he was bored and lonesome, I prescribed supper at this particular restaurant as an antidote.

The soft lights, the droning orchestra, the aroma of delicately seasoned viands, the clink and clatter of glass and silver, changed the lover into the epicure. He relaxed and glanced about on the heterogeneous crowd.

Directly, after I'd finished jotting down our order, I felt his fingers on my sleeve.

"Third table to your left, Putnam," he whispered. "Bacchus and his dryads."

I looked to where he indicated. There, at one of the center tables, was a tall, perfectly groomed man with a bright-eyed, red-lipped girl at each elbow. They were a conspicuous trio, and others were noticing them, too. The girls were merry, the man hilarious—sipping liberally of the golden liquor before him, his handsome face flushed, his slender hands gesturing eloquently.

I recognized him at once.

"Oh, that's Richard Walton, ex-head of the Javanese Board of Missions," I told Bruce.

"Head of a board of missions!" he exclaimed doubtingly. "When did evening clothes displace the cassock, and what canon permits a minister the fatal combination of wine and women?"

I grinned. "Walton's no longer a respecter of cassocks and canons. At present he's manager of the new Parisian Theatre and author of the show that opens it next week. Beside that," I added, "he's what you see him now and even more than the scandal journals accuse him of being."

"Humph!" Bruce was still watching him. "Do you know him personally?"

I shook my head. "I do—and I don't," I answered. "And that contradiction also sums up the man: Walton's an *is* and an *isn't*."

I turned to my soup, but Bruce seemed to be pondering what I had said.

"*Javanese* Board of Missions," he muttered as if to himself. "Why, Carol once lived in Java. Perhaps she knew that fellow." The possibility apparently did not please him, for he frowned.

Appraising Walton now, he was hardly the sort with whom a man of homespun virtues would want the woman he loved to come into contact. His hair, luminously black, waved rakishly upward from a broad, massive brow; beneath, his eyes shone like twin balls of ebony, heated by an inner fire; his smooth cheeks were flushed a dull crimson, and his lips thickened into a leer as he bent toward his handsomely gowned companions.

"Look at him, Putnam," Bruce ejaculated, " look at him now!"

Walton's magnetic face was aglow; more hilarious than ever, he was hurling *bon mots* at friend and stranger alike, smoking cigarette after cigarette, gulping his wine by the glassful.

As I watched, I saw a change come over him. It was gradual at first, then increasingly pronounced. The brilliance faded from his eyes, his laughter quieted, and furrows of troubled thought wrinkled his brow. He grew silent, disregarding the chatter of

his rouged companions, and pushed his wine-glass from him. His features twitched for a moment, indicating some violent inward struggle, then hardened and became colorless.

I was fascinated, so much so that I did not even glance at Bruce to see how he was taking it.

The next minute Walton, trembling, rose to his feet. He clutched the table-edge with one hand to steady himself and, stiffening to his full height, squared his shoulders and lifted the other hand to command attention.

"Stop!" he cried. His voice was thick, but it carried above the noise with a ring of authority. "Stop, I say!" he shouted louder. "Men and women, we have forgotten something!"

The music quavered into a jargon of discordant notes and hushed. The dancers paused. Every one in the restaurant looked toward him, startled, yet expecting some public display of wit, some huge joke.

Walton swayed. "We have eaten, we have drunk," he continued in measured tones, "without offering our thanks to the Giver of all nourishment. Men and women, bow your heads while I invoke His blessing."

He stretched forth his arms, closed his eyes and prayed:

"O, Lord, we, Thy children, thank Thee for this food and drink, and humbly beg that Thy divine pleasure be upon us now and forevermore. Amen."

He resumed his seat with unbroken dignity between the two girls. The color rushed back into his cheeks and he swept a hand across his forehead in bewilderment, as if just awakened from a dream. Then, in the silence of the big room, he burst out again, laughing, bantering, cajoling, apparently unaware of what had occurred.

I heard Bruce breathing heavily. For the moment I had entirely forgotten him.

"Why, boy, you're white as your shirt-front!" I exclaimed. "No sense in that. Buck up! Don't mind that drunken fool."

He drew away from the table. "Let's get out of here, Putnam,' he gasped. "What if Carol—— Call for your check and let's go."

Being a trifle upset myself, my appetite gone, I did as he asked without protest.

"Tell me about that man," he said as we left the restaurant. "Heaven knows I'm not a purist, but I have my scruples. The devil himself must have winced at the blasphemy of that performance. Who is—who was—this Richard Walton?"

The story was unique, but quickly told. Turning in the direction of our club, and braced by the crisp night air, I began:

"It was on a swing around the world a few years ago, when I stopped at Batavia, that I first met him. Batavia was headquarters of the mission work in the Sunda Islands, and Walton, while rather young for his responsibilities, was the whole brains and motive force of that work.

"Then, at the most vital period of his career, when even the high churchmen of Europe and America were praising his accomplishments, came a transformation," I continued, walking more slowly at Bruce's side. "Walton suffered a violent shock, which was too much for his delicately balanced brain, and mental disorders followed. The result was peculiar, startling. His finer memories were blotted out and his spiritual nature killed, and almost overnight he changed from a saint into a devil.

"Of course these newly aroused instincts soon lost him his office and caused his expulsion from the ministry. He left Java, came to New York, and here gave his worldiness free rein. For one thing, he plunged into business speculation, played the market like a wizard and shortly accumulated a fortune.

"But money wasn't his final objective. Next he built the Parisian Theatre. That's his real business," I said, "and the temple of his present doctrine. For there, he declares through the press, he'll 'teach provincial America the mysterious art of juggling fire without burning her fingers.' In my opinion he'll do it, too, if anybody can."

We reached the club and stopped outside the entrance.

"Putnam," Bruce asked, "what was the shock that did all this to Walton? "Wasn't

it a girl?" he persisted, and I felt his eyes boring through the semi-darkness into mine.

"Why—yes," I admitted, "I believe it was. The story came to me from third parties when I touched Batavia later. I didn't know the girl myself. She was engaged to Walton, broke with him abruptly and left Java immediately afterward. At least that's what I heard."

"And her father was American consul there at that time?" Bruce put the question in a whisper.

"Yes," I replied, still not sure of what he was getting at. "But I thought you didn't know anything about the affair. What is on your mind?" I demanded. "Bruce, you aren't letting your imagination run away with you, are you?"

He signaled the club starter for a taxi.

"It isn't my imagination," he said quietly, turning from me toward the curb. "It just happens that I know something of the missing chapters of this story. A careful man doesn't affiance himself to a girl until he learns a bit of her past; but I was content with general facts without names. That's why I was so dense at first. "Goodnight, Putnam," he touched his hat formally. "Thanks for the supper."

I stared dumbly after him as he stepped into the taxi and was driven away. A few minutes later I was slouched in a chair in the club library, screened by a newspaper, trying to collect my senses and realize just what had happened.

"Surely the boy's wrong," I thought. "If Carol Alden is all that he describes her, she can't be the same girl who jilted Richard Walton. He was as nearly perfect as a mortal could be, a fit husband for the best of women. Folks there in the European quarter of Batavia blamed her entirely for what happened; said she quit him without cause or warning, consequently ruining his career and damning his soul. None of them defended her—she didn't even stay to defend herself—and her flight from the island was taken as final proof of her guilt."

I did not see Bruce during the next several days, but on the eve of the opening of the Parisian Theatre he called me by phone.

"Putnam," he said, "I have a box for tomorrow night. Van Meter, the Parisian's attorney, wants me to see the show. He won't be there, but another party and myself will. If you care to come, too, will you join us in the foyer just before the first curtain?"

"I certainly shall," I replied, relieved even to hear his voice. Then I ventured: "Is Miss Alden back in town?"

"Yes," he answered; and, guessing the reason of the query, added: "But it isn't she who'll be with me."

When I met him in the Parisian foyer the next evening I found that Doctor Deverly was his second guest. The Doctor was a mutual friend of ours, and a psychologist of sorts. As I shook hands with him, Bruce remarked:

"I've told Deverly about Richard Walton and that little drama he staged for us last week at Montpensier's. He's interested in Walton as a subject, that's why he came tonight."

Deverly, who was no mean man of the world himself, lifted his eyebrows and twisted the tips of his mustache.

"Besides," he grinned, "Walton promises to give us all the police commissioner will allow—and then some!"

The Doctor was right. Walton gave us everything the law allowed. He had titled the show "Saturnalia," and it truly out-Romaned the Romans in its modern version of their pagan festival. It was the spiciest of the spice, the boldest of the bold. Combining the snap and gaiety of Trouville with the bubble and recklessness of holiday Broadway, the author then had thrown into it the champagne drops of his own conscienceless daring. As a high touch of perfection, he had selected the most beautiful and shapely and audacious chorus that ever delighted the ear and eye of a connoisseur.

Of all the faces I saw Bruce's alone expressed no pleasure. Its seriousness deepened as one scene followed another, but nothing escaped his scrutiny.

Applause after applause thundered across the footlights. The audience was enthralled, their appetite insatiable. When the curtain went down on the last encore they rose en masse and called for Walton. The call was

repeated again and again, and directly he appeared.

Walton smiled in acknowledgment of the cheers that greeted him, his features charged with the same magnetism Bruce and I had felt at Montpensier's. His speech was a fit aftermath to the show—witty, sparkling, risque—delivered with the easy arrogance of a man who knows his world and his audience, and fears neither.

All at once, however, I saw that his poise was becoming unsteady.

The transition came more suddenly than it did in the restaurant. Walton lurched forward to the very edge of the stage, the footlights playing weirdly upon his drawn features. He broke off in his speech, lifted his right hand and studied the open palm as if it were a printed page.

"Our text for today is the twenty-fourth verse, sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew," he announced solemnly:

"'No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.'"

An uncanny stillness settled over the theater. In the pit below us a youth made a joking remark to his companion. Somewhere in the rear a girl giggled.

Raising his bloodshot eyes to the dome, the author of "Saturnalia," the Lothario of Broadway, launched into one of the most magnificent sermons ever preached. For five minutes his eloquence poured over the audience in reverential waves, stinging the consciences of his spellbound hearers, branding worldliness with saline bitterness, condemning to damnation the very principles on which he was building his fame.

It ended as quickly as it began. Walton pressed his fists to his temples and, with a wild, tortured cry—"My God, my God, why hast Thou so cursed me?"—turned his back on the audience and staggered toward the wings.

A woman screamed, another fainted. A red-faced man, on the front row, swore aloud and hurried to the nearest exit. Others followed, not in panic, yet driven by an unknown fear, glancing over their shoulders at the now deserted stage.

Going out, we three paused in the foyer.

"Well, Deverly, what do you make of it?" It was Bruce who spoke, far more calmly than I could.

"Remarkable! Remarkable!" muttered Deverly. "I wouldn't have missed seeing that for anything. A most interesting case, surely."

"Can you explain it in language which we laymen will understand?" I asked.

"Oh, yes." He thought for a moment, playing with his mustache.

"It's evident that Walton has these lapses without forewarning," he said, "and doesn't remember them afterward. His religious instincts are dead to his conscious self, thanks indirectly to the girl you mentioned, Bruce. But when that conscious self is unbalanced by liquor his subconscious, or subjective mind—the storehouse of those instincts—gets control and dictates his speech and actions. Of course, judging by the scene in the restaurant and what we saw tonight, the condition is temporary. The objective mind soon regains its hold, pushing his spiritual past back into oblivion."

Bruce's increasing interest in Walton puzzled me. His first feeling of repugnance had changed to an almost morbid attraction. Deliberately, by an alliance with Van Meter, he had put himself into personal relation with the man.

The press was careful not to mention the display Walton made of himself that first night, but word of it spread verbally, adding to the glamor of his name and the popularity of his show. With scarcely an exception the critics praised "Saturnalia" extravagantly. Then, as Bruce predicted, the Civic Purity League had their say. "Contaminating—a carnival of polite crime," they branded it, and immediately began legal action to have it suppressed. I knew that meant work for Bruce; and, remembering his own opinion of the show, doubted if he could put any sincerity into its defense.

Some days later I received a note from Bruce, brief but startling:

"Come to my office Saturday afternoon at 3:15," it read. "Walton comes at 3:30

to go over the case with me. Carol is due later. Don't fail me, Putnam, please."

That last sentence was significant of what was happening behind Bruce's mask of Spartanism. I did not fail him. Promptly at 3:15 that Saturday afternoon I was at his office.

"Bruce," I began, taking a chair near him, "as you sent for me, I feel that I have a right to know what to expect. First, have you talked with Miss Alden about Richard Walton since she came home?"

"Yes"—he bit his lip—"I told her everything and she told me everything. Our ideas and ideals accord exactly."

"Then it's all right between you?" I inquired, anxious to be reassured.

"Perfectly." His chin lifted a trifle. "I'm proud to say, Putnam, that I didn't misjudge the mettle of my late fiancée."

"Your *late* fiancée?" I repeated. "Bruce, it didn't come to that?"

He inclined his head. "It was the only thing to do under the circumstances. A girl can't belong to two men at once. I released her."

"Why, boy!" I exclaimed, gripping his arm, "she doesn't belong to Walton in any sense now. You know that. What's more, you shouldn't bring her into even formal contact with such a man."

"But please remember, Putnam," Bruce interrupted, his voice low but decisive, "that his present isn't his real character. That's the vital point; everything else is secondary."

His eyes kindled with Puritanic zeal.

"Walton was meant to help save the world, not damn it," he went on; "but, if he continues as he is now, he'll be one of the greatest agents of evil in all history. Working beneath the guise of promoting pleasure, he's capable of making his vicious influence felt in every corner of civilization."

Bruce pounded the desk in his excited earnestness.

"Why, man," he cried, "what's the selfish love of two people to the salvation of millions? Nothing, nothing! And Carol Alden—Putnam, I adore her, worship her. A girl who'll sacrifice herself to attain such an end is a saint!"

I sank back in my chair and stared at him.

"You're going to give her to Walton?" I gasped. "Give her to him in the hope of changing a pander into a parson? Nonsense, Bruce! I tell you, he won't even recognize her."

"That's what we shall see," Bruce again spoke calmly.

At that moment the hall door opened.

It was Richard Walton. Bruce rose to meet him with a cordiality and respect that were unfeigned. When we were introduced Walton clasped my hand warmly, but gave no sign of ever having seen me before.

He took off his overcoat and hat, selected the chair I had just left and settled himself with a stretch of his long legs. I retired to a corner near the door and pretended to read a legal journal.

Bruce brought a quart of bourbon, a siphon and glasses from an adjoining room and placed them on the desk.

"Ah!" Walton exclaimed, filling one of the glasses without waiting for an invitation. "Maxwell, you surely guessed the unspoken wish of my parched tongue. Now, with something more liquid than law we can properly answer this Purity League balderdash."

His back was to me as he and Bruce bent over the papers.

"The prudes!" he swore after a while. "I reckon that Purity League wants me to name my house the Holy Grail and put on the old miracle plays!"

He refilled his glass with straight whisky and drank it at a gulp.

Both apparently had become unconscious of me, and for the next half-hour they were occupied with the mass of papers. Then Walton spoke again:

"Mark my words, sir"—shaking his finger at Bruce—"every one of those reformers are hypocrites, envious because my house is being crowded to the foyer while their medieval churches echo only to the pussyfooting of the minister and the janitor!"

Another period of semi-silence, during which Bruce continued to ply him with

liquor. Once I saw him glance at the clock, and his lips tightened. I shuddered.

It was coming. I could feel it, see it. The objective man was losing his grip, stumbling through the narrow borderland that separated his present from his past.

Bruce again glanced at the clock, then toward the door. He had timed proceedings well. I heard the sound of footsteps approaching along the hall. He heard them, too, and rose, his shoulders squared as if to meet an onslaught.

The next moment the knob turned, the door swung open, and Carol Alden stepped into the room.

She was of medium height and slender, wearing a becoming street suit of gray. Her delicately molded face was pallid, but her chin was firm; and beneath her trim hat and fluffy brown hair shone the most wonderful and pathetic eyes I have ever seen.

Walton stopped his pacing when she entered. Bruce came forward.

"Mr. Walton," he said, "let me renew your acquaintance with Miss Carol Alden, daughter of the late American consul to Java."

Without a tremor she went over to Walton and offered her hand. He took it, smiled and bowed low.

"Daughter, it is indeed a great pleasure to meet you," he said simply, and released her hand.

Bruce stepped aside, leaving them facing each other.

"Why, Dick, you don't seem to recognize me." Carol's tone was playfully reproving. She flung off her hat and plunged immediately into her rôle. "Surely you remember the girl who promised to marry you. I'm she, Carol Alden. Look at me, Dick, and tell me you know me."

He stared at her as if he did not grasp her words.

"Please, please, Dick, don't be so cold," she coaxed, moving closer to him. "You haven't forgotten those moonlit Java nights when we dreamed together by the ocean, and the palm-thatched mission where I helped you with your work, and that wheezy little organ I played while your converts sang?

A faint light of recognition dawned in Walton's eyes, flickering, momentary. Then they dulled again. He slowly shook his head.

"What's the trouble, daughter?" he inquired gently. "You seem agitated. I don't quite understand. Can I be of comfort to you? As a minister of the Gospel, I'm at your service."

"That's it, you are a minister of the Gospel!" she cried triumphantly. "It's your gift to save souls. You can, you can, you have! Oh, darling, try to remember! Java —Batavia—Batavia—the mission—Carol—Carol Alden—Alden," she repeated.

"It was wonderful work you did there, but the constant grind was too much for even you. Can't you recollect? Your brain and body had to have more strength, false strength. But that part of it is over now. I've forgiven you, Dick; I love you. Please take me back and let us start again together, the work you began."

Her bosom quivered. She lifted her face to his, her arms crept about his neck; her lips were close to his lips, smiling, warm, inviting.

It was marvelous acting, but ghastly in its very perfection. I looked at Bruce and groaned.

Walton hesitated, trembling. His features were blanched and rigid; his hands clasped and unclasped themselves hungerly. Then, stiffening, he reached up, jerked her arms from around his neck and pushed her from him.

The color surged into Carol's cheeks and she caught her breath. There was a new expression in her face, a mingling of pride and contempt. For the moment she forgot the falsity of the scene that she had been acting. (Or did she forget?).

"A few years ago you wouldn't have pushed me from you like that," she charged, her fists clenched at her sides. "You wanted me then; wanted me more than anything—except opium." She drew farther away from him. "But under the spell of that poison your love changed and your caresses were those of a beast, not a man. It aroused something in you I never dreamed was there. I prayed with you, fought the

habit with you, gave you every chance. But it was useless. You didn't want to stop. Then, to save myself, I retracted my promise—and left Java, quickly, to keep from exposing you by having to tell any one my reason."

It was an explanation, an indictment, hurled into his very teeth for denial.

She laughed, a cutting, hysterical laugh.

"You were a great minister, Richard Walton," she cried, "but there was a wolf beneath your fleece. I found it there, crafty, unsuspected by others, and—thank God!—I escaped its fangs!"

Walton's dull expression held. He seemed to scarcely hear what the girl said. It was as if his consciousness functioned on another plane.

Fumbling for his watch, he muttered:

"It is late. I must be going. There are other folks waiting for the Message."

I helped him on with his hat and coat and, taking his arm to steady him, went with him to the door. From behind us came a choked sob, that of a man who had reached the limit of his strength. Before us the dimly lighted hall was deserted and still.

Walton paused on the threshold, raised his hands in benediction and regarded me with liquor reddened eyes.

"Good-night, brother," he said. "May the Guardian of us all direct you along the way to everlasting life."

Standing there, I watched him reel drunkenly down the hall. His head was thrown back, his face uplifted to the shadowy ceiling. I lost sight of him when he rounded a corner.

I turned, started back into the office, and stopped. Carol was seated in a chair and Bruce, kneeling beside her, had his head in her lap. She bent over him, took his chin in her palm and her wonderful eyes gazed tenderly into his.

"We did our best, dearest," she murmured. "It was a perfect test, but it failed. The old Richard Walton is dead forever."

Bruce wrapped his arms about her and drew her closer.

"Yes," he said, "and his ghost shall never haunt our happiness again. You splendid, splendid woman!"

Knowing that some time absence is the better part of friendship, I quietly closed the door and tiptoed down the hall.

HUMAN SKELETONS ON A DESERT ISLAND

MANY evidences of human habitation were discovered on the now uninhabited island of Nihoa, part of the Hawaiian Bird Island Reservation, 250 miles northwest of the main archipelago, by a scientific party which visited the reservation aboard the U. S. S. *Tanager* under the auspices of the Bishop Museum, according to statements made on the return of the party to Honolulu.

Acres of garden terraces, house sites, implements scattered about the island, bluff shelters, infant burial places, skeletons and temple ruins were uncovered by the scientists.

They would tend to prove that the Nihoa residents bore some relationship ao the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands proper, according to Kenneth C. Emory, archeologist of the Bishop Museum. The temples bore a resemblance to the ancient Hawaiian heiaus, or worshipping places, especially in their dry masonry work and in the fact that some of the surfaces were paved with pebbles.

Conditions on Nihoa are favorable to human habitation, he continued. The soil is good and sufficient rain falls to permit of the cultivation of sweet potatoes, yams or sugar cane.

Some of the relics that were found in the house sites were considered significant by the scientists who are engaged in the general problem of discovering the origin of the Polynesian race. The specimens will be studied further.

Personally Conducted

By HAMILTON CRAIGIE

CHAPTER ONE

AT the mouth of a dark alley leading from the corner of Great Jones Street were three men, an evil trinity—three men, hard-bitten, furtive, with their hands against every man's and especially the police. Skeets Poggi, Giusep', the Bite; Lupo, the Wolf—they grinned in the darkness, thick fingers upon the butts of their automatics, as from the dim distance there came abruptly the sound of a quick, clinking footfall—some one was coming up.

The lives of the three men crouching there in the shadow were forfeit to the State; yeggs, crooks, strong-arms, they had felt the dragnet of the law hemming them in, crowding them close. And the man who had been their enemy, the Nemesis hounding them from hang-out to hang-out, was Headquarters Detective David Williamson, and he but a short two years on the force.

The three in the shadow had sworn to get him, but Williamson seemed to bear the proverbial charmed life. Only the week before they had tried it and failed—from the window of a taxi, as the detective, off duty, had been going home.

With the sixth sense that seemed a part of him he had whirled, gun out, even as the gangsters opened fire; his first bullet had ripped through the Wolf's thick hand; they had fled, cursing, with the staccato thunder of the exhaust waking the echoes—and the pursuit.

But they had gotten clean.

Now, in the dimness of the alley, the Wolf lifted his gun hand where the white of the bandage showed against the darkness. He spoke in a low, growling whisper:

"He's a-comin', you guys. Th' sneakin' dick. You know w'at I say, no shootin'—but we'll fix him good."

Detective Williamson, smiling to himself in the darkness, came onward, humming a little tune. In a very little while he would be home, in the small flat, northward across the city, where, waiting for him, as was her custom, was the mother who had been everything to him since he could remember, and he was all she had.

He had tried to persuade her not to lose her rest, but he might as well have tried to move a mountain; something of the quality that had made him a terror to evildoers was in the frail woman who was his wife and sweetheart in one; she could be stubborn.

That morning she had clung to him in a sudden, unreasonable apprehension.

"Dick, boy, be careful," she had begged him. "Somehow I feel they'll kill you. Some night you'll never come back."

He had soothed her as best he could. It was all in the game, he had told her; but was it, where a mother was concerned? And now, walking toward that alley at the corner of Great Jones Street, he was humming a tune; in a very little while he would be home.

And then, out of the black maw of that alley at the corner he heard the muffled purring of a motor; it rose, died, with the quick throttling of its sixty horses, against the low-hung curtain of the dark.

Officer Williamson wheeled abruptly to the right-about. At that hour and in that place a car, stationary, but with its engine running, was a matter for investigation. He turned, entering the alley until, when half-way down its length, at a sound that had come to him abruptly from his right, he froze, rigid, like a pointer at gaze.

Straining his gaze, he could see nothing, hear nothing, and yet, with the sixth sense that is perhaps a heritage from prehistoric man, he knew that he was not alone.

Something, some one abode with him in that midnight blackness—a something that, as he crouched there, all his faculties at pitch, descended upon him with thud of slung-shot and the bruising impact of fist and foot.

Invisible in the darkness, his attackers, by sheer weight of numbers, had slammed him backward against the wall, so that for the moment he was unable to use his gun. Twice he had dragged them, hanging upon his shoulders, his arms, half-way to where that arclight blazed.

His fist got home on bone and flesh, as, cursing, the leader of the bandit swung up his gun.

But the bandit-leader did not fire. Instead he swung it in a short arc. A goan, and the detective, pitching forward upon his face, lay silent.

The Wolf's grin was the quick grin of a tiger. He swore, an obscure Sicilian oath, deep in his throat. Then between them they carried the limp body outward to the street.

Like a man drunk the detective's head lolled from his shoulders. From the corner of the street there came the rattle of a nightstick and the clumping pound of feet. Then he was lifted, swung, flung like a sack of meal into the waiting car and it roared onward and away.

CHAPTER TWO

IT had begun to snow, with a slanting drizzle, as northward a good fifty blocks the car slid slowly to a halt.

Here, in a narrow alley between two warehouses, with the slap and gurgle of the river just below, there was what seemed at first to be a blank wall; then, as the Wolf rapped softly thrice a door slid open, and the keeper of the hang-out put out his head.

"Lo, Zinzy," greeted the Wolf, pointing to something covered with a blanket huddled between the seats. "'S a cold night Zinzy; how about a little steam?"

The man called "Zinzy" grinned out of the corner of his mouth. He turned now as, following Lupo, there came the others; they joked together, low-voiced, with the prospect of that which was to come.

Outside, hunched over the steering-wheel, the driver gazed with a dark scowl at that still shape huddled beneath the blanket at the bottom of his car.

Presently, when the gunmen would come out, the limp something that was, or had been, Detective Williamson would be bestowed forever from the sight of men. They were taking no chances; they meant to see to it that when the roll was called it would be just another sent on a one-way ticket to the Port of Missing Men.

The driver was nursing a grudge. There had to be a lookout, he knew that well enough, but the Wolf had assured him that they would be gone but a moment, and now it had been a long ten minutes following their entry into the dim hang-out below the street.

The Wolf had not stopped, however, merely for the "steam." There was a trifle of a journey ahead of them before they could dispose of that limp body in the tonneau with safety. The man who was serving them now behind his battered bar was a dealer in other things besides moonshine. With a new license-plate under his coat he was turning from the bar, as the driver, hunched forward over his wheel, sucked viciously at his cigarette.

Sullen, disgruntled, he slumped forward in his seat, cap pulled low over his eyes, as the three men came out. To their jocular badinage he returned no answer, preserving a sullen silence, as the three boarded the car, the Wolf bringing up the rear.

But the Wolf, with a glance at the driver and a muttered word, got in, following the others, to stumble, with a quick oath, over that huddled body beneath the robe.

The car, with a sudden jerk, pulled out of the alley, facing into the north.

The driver, hunched forward over his wheel, had "given her the gas."

Northward and ever north, with the three in the tonneau and the fourth silent beneath his blanket upon the floor, the great car drove, with the man at the wheel calling upon his engine for speed and yet more speed until, lurching forward in his seat, the Wolf shouted between his cupped palms:

"Hey, Hinch, what's a-matter of you? Do you want to croak us, hey? You watch your step!"

But the driver did not answer.

He had never driven that car before as he was driving her tonight. Fifty, sixty miles an hour—the speedometer arose, quivered, hung, as out of the while pall just ahead there came a quick blaze of light, an oath; a car, meeting them, head-on, he had swerved past by a hair.

The bandit leader vented a quick, startled oath.

"I t'ought he moved," he muttered, his foot for a moment upon the blanket at his feet. But that contraband had been potent; that and the ice-cold air following the warm room back there in the alley. The three dozed now, as the driver, frowning forward over his wheel, swung the great car abruptly into a main-traveled street.

Ahead of him at a transfer point for the inter-urban trolley there shone for a moment a gleam of brass buttons; the policeman, moving into the roadway, held up his hand.

Then, at the roaring downswoop of that car—it seemed to rush upon him like a thunderbolt—he leaped outward out of the way. He shook his head, going into his booth and to the telephone. Behind the driver there came a stirring of that blanket; a face, livid, distorted, rose for a moment in an agony of effort, then fell backward with a groan, as the three, lolling upon the seat, dozed, their slack bodies swaying grotesquely together to the lift and rebound of the protesting springs.

A turn, and with a rocketing rush the car stormed down a side street with, in the distance, a cluster of green lights—a police station. Of a sudden its front door erupted men, night-sticks in hand, and from behind the car there came the staccato thunder of a motorcycle.

The three in the tonneau of a sudden were jolted awake, reached for their guns, cursing, their maledictions directed at the driver. With that blue-coated phalanx fronting him, guns out, his face pale beneath his cap, the chauffeur braked the huge car abruptly to a grinding halt.

The Wolf's face was a study in rage. The policeman on the cycle had rolled slowly to a halt as the driver got down heavily from his seat. The Wolf, the light of understanding in his face, snarled at the driver out of the corner of his mouth, in the prison twist, swinging up his gun:

"Hinch, you cussed stool-pigeon," he was beginning, "you've lagged us right, you double-crossing crook. I was leary of you back there in the alley, but now you're goin' to get yours."

His finger was pressing the trigger as a hard hand struck up the gun. The driver, cap thrust upward at an angle, had reached inward with a grin, with the same motion lifting the blanket with a jerk.

The Wolf, his jaw slack, stared at the face beneath the blanket, turning to the man grinning at him beneath that tilted cap.

"God!" he exclaimed, in a slow dragging whisper. "You come to life while we was in at Zinzy's—ha?"

"Right," answered Officer Williamson, his gaze upon the blanket that might have been his shroud. "I beaned your chauffeur, changed places with him and then I drove you—you and Giusep' and Poggi—to the right place, Wolf. Well, as you might say, personally conducted. Now, get going. The lieutenant has got a nice little party all fixed and ready for you—up the stairs."

Midnight Voices

By DONALD R. BARNETT

FROM the darkest and crookedest part of Hobart Alley came the sound of a fusillade of shots. Then the sound of a piercing cry, dying down to an anguished series of groans.

Patrolman Jeffery Burris, swinging his night-stick along Plymouth Street, heard the outburst and paused. The alley was the haunt of the gunman, yegg and dip. Its downstairs dives, which could be relied upon to furnish their quota of crooks day or night, flourished under stores whose methods were under the surveillance of the police.

Underneath the blue insignia of the patrolman beat a stout heart. He blew a shrill blast of his whistle, took his service gun from its resting place beneath his arm and ran in the direction whence the sound had come.

Every nerve in Burris's stalwart frame was keyed to the breaking point. He thought of the three men who had been murdered in this very spot a year or so ago, with never a trace of their assailants being brought to light, although the best men on the squad had bulldozed and threatened the alley rats for a month.

Two other policemen came up, blown and spent, in response to his whistle.

"It's the divil's own job!" exclaimed Burris, mopping his forehead. "I was here before the echo of the shots had died away, and not a soul can I find."

"Have you made a complete search of the alley?" asked one of the cops.

"No, but there wasn't no one runnin' when I came in, and they can't hide in there."

"You two start in at Plymouth and search every foot of the ground. Don't overlook a thing. I'll stay at this end to head off any one that you might happen to rout out."

Burris and Kelly cut over into Tenth Avenue, ran along its length for two or three blocks and then swung back into Hobart Alley once more. The street itself was dark, but here and there a light shone in an upper window and a sleepy head was thrust out to discover the cause of the commotion. The policemen searched between buildings and tried doors for one that might be unlocked, but not a thing that might even arouse suspicion could they find.

As they had found no evidence of a crime having been committed, Burris resumed his beat, and the other men departed to their own duties elsewhere.

The next morning while Burris was washing up at the station the Chief sent for him.

"What's this I hear about a robbery in your district last night?" he asked.

"News to me, sir," replied Burris.

"Well, it's not to me. They made a big haul and a clean getaway. Were you gone from your post at any time?"

"Along about two o'clock there were several shots fired in Hobart Alley. I went in to see what was up. Kelly and Patterson heard my whistle and answered the call, but when we searched the alley not a hide or hair of any one could we find. I was not more than two hundred yards away, on Plymouth Street, when I heard the rumpus, and I swear that nobody ran either way."

"That is the second time such a cock-and-bull story has come in this last week. Morarity, over on the North Side, reports a safe blown and he had the same tale to offer to explain his being among those missing."

"The old man is sure hot," Burris said

to his bunk-mate when the captain had dismissed him at the end of the interview.

"It's getting near election time," was the laconic answer. "The captain wants to stop the clamor that has gone up all over town about these robberies that are being pulled."

"What ones beside last night?"

"There have been three robberies this past week."

"Where?"

"Different places. The crooks don't pick on any one district, and the jobs are all slick ones. No amateur stuff about any of them. The Chief had Radcliff, Daems and Harrison all on the job in plain clothes, but nobody's been pinched yet. The axe is going to fall on somebody before long."

Burris was transferred over to the wholesale district, given a quiet beat and told to rest up for another bit of duty on the alley.

Life ran along smoothly for a week or two. Burris was glad to be away from the crowds of toughs who kept one ever on the alert for a fight or a holdup. Duty on the alley held no delights for any member of the force.

Just as the courthouse clock was striking three one night there came the sound of a woman's voice, raised in passionate appeal.

"My God!" she cried. "You're killing me. Let me go and I'll tell everything. Police!"

There sounded a shot, and then silence fell.

Burris stood stock still for ten seconds. A cold sweat broke out all over him. Murder was being done right before his face, yet there was not a soul to be seen, not a footfall to betray the presence of a lurking assassin.

He ran down a side street and on around the block.

Suddenly he halted, thinking he heard a muffled report. He listened intently, nerves alert for the slightest sign of life. The sound came again, hollow and faint, but unmistakable. With all speed he started in the direction of the noise.

Still Burris could see nothing, could hear nothing but his own labored breath.

Then from the shadows roared a very real automobile, evidently making all possible speed away from the danger zone.

"Halt," shouted Burris.

The answer was a flash of fire from the car and a whistling bullet that thudded into a wall near his head. He jumped behind a convenient telephone pole and returned the fire with enthusiasm. Flying lead tore splinters from the wooden pole and bounded aside, screaming as they glanced from the brick wall at its back. One of the men in the car fell limply across the cushions, his gun clattering to the pavement.

A bullet struck one of the hind tires squarely, the imprisoned air escaping with a rushing hiss and causing the fleeing car to lurch to one side so that it almost ran into a building. But the driver straightened her out and they escaped into the night, firing a parting volley as they careened around the corner.

A hurried investigation proved to Burris that his fears were justified. A window had been broken in the rear of the Metal Products building, and the big safe which guarded the company's current funds had been blown open. He climbed through the window and looked around.

The office was a wreck. Burris looked at a long, shear-like instrument thrown down by the side of the ruined strong-box.

"High-class can-opener," he murmured. "Nobody's fools, these birds. They done a neat job."

He found a telephone in the building.

"Main 42," he called.

"Hello," rasped a voice at the other end of the wire.

"Morrison, this is Burris. They just cracked the tin box of the Metal Products Company and made a clean getaway in a machine."

"Where are you now?"

"In the Product Company's office."

"Did you get the number of the car?"

"They had the license plate all smeared with mud so that no one could read the numbers. It was a gray touring car, one-man top, spare tire on behind, which they may have to use, for I put a bullet into one of theirs. They headed north, cutting towards Eleventh Street. One of them was

hurt bad, because he fell over the side of the car and another had to pull him in."

"I'll send Pete down to take your place. Come right in when he gets there and let me hear all the details."

Twenty minutes later Burris was relieved. He hurried to the station, where he found Morrison pacing the floor. As he entered the Chief came in at another door, looking cross and sleepy.

"Three in one week is too much," he exploded. "Look here, Burris, what in the devil's name ails you, anyway? You used to be the best man I had, and yet two of the biggest jobs of the year are pulled off right under your nose. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"No need for me to say, Captain. You wouldn't believe me if I told you anything. You have heard my explanations three times already."

"Go ahead. But don't tell me the tale about being called to the other end of the beat while the yeggs were working on the safe."

"I knew that you wouldn't believe it. Just the same, the facts are this: The night was perfectly still. All of a sudden I heard shots fired and heard a woman scream, in the opposite direction from where they blew the safe. I ran down the street towards the shots, my gun in my hand, but when I got there the place was empty. If the parties who made those sounds had grown wings they couldn't have made a getaway with any less noise than they made tonight."

"What did you do then?"

"I hunted around for a while, until I thought I heard an explosion a few blocks away. Then a second one right on the heels of the first. I knew something real was up, so I legged it back down the street as fast as I could, wondering all the time where the explosion could be. As I crossed McLeod Avenue a big car came tearing out of the shadow back of the Metal Products building. I jumped behind a telephone pole and cut loose with my gat. I plugged one of them and put a hole through a tire, but they got away."

"How big a haul did they make?"

"Whatever was in the safe. They didn't go through the rest of the place, so far as I could see. They used too much soup, and the noise scared them away."

"Burris, if you weren't one of the best men that I ever had on the squad, I would tie the can to you here and now. However, I'm going to give you one more chance. Take a month's layoff, with pay, and see if you can clear some of the cobwebs out of our brains. Then come back, and I will put you on the hardest job that we have and see if you can make good."

"Thanks, Captain. I guess I do need a rest."

Burris went home and lay down to fitful slumber. Half-awake, half-asleep, he would hear a woman's agonized plea for mercy, then a shot, followed by silence. Running feet pursued him, haunted him, tantalized him into following, and then vanished on the wings of the night.

At last he could stand it no longer. Jumping up, he donned a civilian suit and, although he had been in bed but three hours, made his way downstairs to the street.

Burris leisurely meandered toward his beat of the previous evening. Trucks were being loaded at the big sliding doors in the rear of the warehouses, and bales of goods were being trundled down the long platforms to and from the loading places.

No one was loitering near the particular spot whence had come the distress signals of the night before. Overhead a lineman was busy with a wire. Burris watched him casually for a while, in the meantime studying the locality carefully.

Nothing unusual here. Then he looked things over with a view of finding a possible hiding place for an assassin. He circled the block as he had done the night before, being more than ever struck with the difficulties which a man would face in trying to make his escape unseen.

An entire morning's search failed to reveal the slightest sign of violence. Baffled and discouraged, Burris leaned against a telephone post and, taking off his cap, scratched his bushy red head.

"The Captain may be right," he mutter-

ed. "Perhaps I'm addled. I'm either nutty or haunted; I hope it's nutty."

It was almost dusk before he realized that he had eaten nothing since the night before. He wandered down to the Boston Grill and put in his order for a big steak smothered with onions. While he was idly scanning the crowd, waiting for his meal, he saw Morarity come in and take a seat not far away. He motioned to him with a menu.

"Sit down. I want somebody to look me over and see if I'm all here, and I'll take a little look at you, too, for you're in about the same boat as myself. Was you kiddin' the old man when you told him about hearin' a ruckus just before they blew the safe on you over there on the North Side?"

"No more than you were about Hobart Alley."

"These jobs look like the work of professionals. The chances are one gang is doing it all, but what about the fights? Are they fakes? Can it be that they played in luck three times, pulling the job when we were called away by somebody else?"

"I'll confess I'm stumped."

The meal over, Burris paid his check and walked out into the street. His mind was numbed with vain efforts to find a solution to the problem that was perplexing him so sorely.

And for days after that he walked the streets, seeking some sign which would bring success to his almost hopeless undertaking, some key to the mystery which had already baffled the best brains of the city's police force.

Then the Arcade Market was robbed.

The Chief was furious.

When Ferguson reported that he had been drawn away from the scene of the burglary by a battle, evidently between two men, both armed, he exploded completely.

"Tell it to Casey," he yelled. "I know I'm soft, but you got to think up a better one than that. That joke had whiskers on it a month ago."

In vain did Ferguson plead for an investigation to find out whether or not he spoke the truth; the public demanded action, and action they would get. The Chief decided that the best way to placate the press was to furnish a victim.

In company with the much-agitated Ferguson, Burris gravitated toward the scene of the last crime. Ferguson described to him exactly where he had been standing when he heard the shots; how he had run down the short block or two intervening, only to find no one there. His insistence on each point was pathetic.

Burris sat down to rest on a jutting ledge of stone used as a bumper for trucks, just out of that portion of the alley described by Ferguson as having been the battleground of the night before.

On peering around the corner a few minutes later he saw something that made his heart leap with excitement. He watched stealthily for a while, and then ambled unconcernedly away.

When a safe distance from the market he hailed a passing cab and drove to his room.

Dressed in a suit of old clothes, his face unshaven, and flaunting an enormous mustache glued with much care to his upper lip, Burris took to searching the alleys, ostensibly in quest of old rubber and bottles. None of his associates recognized him now. Once when he was shambling up a dirty side street, with a sack over his arm, Kelly motioned at him with his stick and told him to get a move on. Burris chuckled softly beneath the shelter of his disguise and slouched away.

He took to sleeping in a cheap lodging-house in order that no one might see him enter his own house in disguise. One Friday night he went to the lodging-house, where he removed his old clothes, shaved and washed and slipped quietly out a side door. Going to his room, he procured his two guns, which he carefully loaded and put into side pockets, along with a police whistle.

At dusk he made his way to the south end of the business district, where some of the largest and best known of the city's retailers were housed. Without haste or hesitation he went directly to the rear of the Bay Brothers fur store.

Cautiously he felt his way along the

rough cement wall, not daring to use the electric flashlight which was part of his equipment. At length his fingers encountered the iron bars which guarded a window set approximately five feet from the ground. Without much effort he pulled the grating out from the bottom and slid the window up. It was hard to clamber up the wall, holding the bars out at the same time, but he managed it, and finally wriggled over the sill into the total darkness of the room.

Like one blind he groped about the interior of the store until he found a heavy box, which he dragged back to serve as a seat during the interval of his waiting.

Presently, as in a dream, his numbed senses caught something that his mind would not interpret. It came again, far off and faint, but this time it brought Burris to his feet with a bound. The cry was a woman's scream for help.

Almost simultaneously a light truck backed up to the window behind Burris. There was a little commotion as men fumbled for the bars, but they were soon raised, and two figures slipped into the room, unaware that ten feet away a gun was pointing in their direction.

"Stick 'em up, boys," Burris called sharply, at the same time pressing the light switch at his back. "Higher. Don't make a move or it will be your last."

He backed over to the window and blew three shrill blasts on his whistle. Soon Ryan came running up. Scenting treachery, he was cautious about approaching the empty truck, but Burris called to him from the window, so he climbed inside, surprised at the scene.

"It's me, Burris, in disguise," he cried. "Slip the bracelets on them, Ryan. We'll give them a ride in their own wagon. They came in to rob this place."

Ryan nodded and secured the two crooks.

They led the prisoners outside to the truck, and with Burris driving, while Ryan held his gun over the manacled men, they rolled up to the police station.

Burris slept at home that night, sincere in the belief that he had rid the city of part of the gang of yeggs whose depredations had reached the point where no one could feel safe. Knowing that the captain would inquire for him in the morning, he rose early and made his way to the station.

The Chief had already inquired for him. Burris went into his private office.

"Hello, there. What do you mean by stopping your vacation to catch a couple of harmless housebreakers?" he grinned.

Burris understood and grinned, too.

"I've got something to show you, whenever you have time," he replied.

"Show me right now, if it has anything to do with the pair you brought in last night."

"Then come with me."

They jumped into the Chief's car and headed for the fur store. When still several blocks distant, Burris asked the Chief to drive around the block into an alley.

"See that wire up there?" said the policeman, pointing to a thin copper wire that stretched from a telegraph pole to the roof of a low building close by.

The Chief nodded.

"On that roof is a radio set with an amplifier. These birds have got a little broadcasting station somewhere, tuned with this set. They must have arranged a certain time, and at the proper minute filled the air with shots and cries for help. When the cop gets there he finds nothing, but in the meantime they have made a haul somewhere else."

"But you haven't explained how you knew that it was to be the fur store."

"They put up their wire in daylight, it being safer that way than to work in the dark, as nobody would suspect what they were doing. I saw them at work. The only place worth robbing anywhere near here was the fur store. When I went to take a look at it I found the bars on the back window cut in two, and the cracks filled with putty. Easy enough for any one to sneak up and do that the night before. But they had to use a car to get the loot away, and didn't want a cop around when they drove up."

The Chief took off his glasses and polished them thoughtfully.

"Lucky for me, Burris, that I didn't fire you," he said.

The Dial of Destruction

By JOE BURKE

PART ONE

DETECTIVE SERGEANT MOORE, night officer in charge of the desk, a badly masticated cigar hanging loosely from the corner of his drooping mouth, dozed on unmindful of the storm without.

"Some weather," ruminated Nick Bradley, star detective of the hill division. He addressed no one in particular. Two other man hunters were sprawled on chairs, puffing away at big black cigars. The next instant the telephone's ring aroused the four men.

"Hello!" growled Moore, casting his mutilated weed into a nearby cuspidor. "Yes, yes, this's police headquarters. What's that?" he bellowed, gripping the phone with his strong, hairy fingers. "Say that again! You're held prisoner in your own house, 60 Dale street, Fairmont? All right, I'll send a man right over. What——" Moore worked the receiver hook up and down viciously and swore under his breath. The circuit had gone dead.

"Bradley!" thundered Moore, pushing the disabled phone from him and glaring at the young officer, "hop into a taxi, break all speed laws to 60 Dale street, Fairmont, and see what's wrong there. A girl just called for help. That's a few miles outside of Hyde Park, and a d—— lonesome place at that. It's twelve-thirty-five. You'd better stop in at station 23 and pick up a couple of house men to help you. Beat it, but keep in touch with me."

Nick Bradley saluted, donned a raincoat and went out into the midsummer deluge.

A nighthawk cab plowing its way through the rain-drenched street was commandeered by the Headquarters man, who snapped out orders, and was off for Fairmont.

In his haste Bradley forgot his superior's instructions to pick up a few policemen at Station 23, and it was not until he was speeding along the isolated road to Fairmont that the order entered his mind. He shrugged his broad shoulders and smiled.

"I guess I can handle the situation alone," he reflected.

The taxi slowed down at an intersecting street and the driver turned his head towards the detective.

"Dis is th' street, officer," he grumbled, peering through sleepy eyes at Bradley. "Will I drive down?"

"No, this'll be all right," responded the Headquarters man, swinging open the door and stepping into the sodden road. The storm had abated somewhat, although thunder rumbled and the lightning cut the scowling sky. "Take this for your trouble," he added, tendering the chauffeur a ten-dollar bill.

"No, no, sir," protested the chauffeur, waving the officer's hand aside and making ready to get his car in motion again. "Detective Bradley, I know you. Dis is my puddle jumper, an' dere's no charge. Goodnight, sir."

With meshed gears grinding and engine roaring, the taxi whirled about and sped off in the darkness. Bradley smiled, pocketed his bill, then hurried down Dale street.

With his flashlight the detective located No. 60. The house stood off the road about fifty feet. A stone wall fronted it, and in the centre two colossal stone pillars flanked a weed-grown driveway. Bradley removed his revolver from his pocket and dropped it into a pocket in his raincoat, then hurried towards the entrance of the somber abode.

He noted that the structure was built in

the old Colonial style. It apparently was in a good state of preservation, although in the inky gloom he could discern but little.

Bradley furtively walked around the silent house before ringing for admittance. He wished to be sure of his ground, as he did not know what he might encounter inside.

A bell pealed weirdly in some distant part of the house when Bradley pushed a bronze button on the door-casing, then there was silence. He waited several seconds, then pushed the button again. This time he thought he heard a sound as if a window was being gingerly raised. Several more rings brought no result. The detective was peeved now, alert and determined. He turned the knob. As he expected, the door held fast.

Walking slowly down the steps, he stood on the walk and looked up at the house again. He then walked around to the back door and found it securely locked. Undaunted, he swung himself upon a piazza on the south side of the house and tiptoed to a window. The detective drew a short bar of steel from his pocket, and the next second the hinged window swung in.

"Some mystery here," he muttered, looking out over the gloomy landscape. The Headquarters man stepped boldly inside.

He closed the window softly, and stood listening, his service revolver gripped firmly in his right hand, while in the other he held his flashlight and turned it on. The powerful glow oscillated, seeking out every nook and cranny, revealing to Bradley's alert eyes every single thing in the room.

He was in a library, and saw that it was handsomely furnished.

"Sumptuous, I'll say," mused Bradley, snapping off the light and walking noiselessly to the closed door. There he listened for any sound that might give him a warning of danger. Then he turned the antiquated glass knob. The door was unlocked and the detective pushed it open. Again he brought his flashlight into play. A large hall was disclosed. A wide carpeted stairway at the west side led to an upper floor.

Three other doors could be dimly seen. They also were closed. All these details Bradley took in at a glance. He had been detailed there to investigate an urgent appeal for help. It was a woman's voice crying that she was being detained against her will. He paused at the stairs and glanced up. A moment later he started and gripped his revolver tighter as a shadow glided along the hall. Although he heard no footsteps, he was sure that his imagination had not deceived him.

Five, maybe ten, minutes passed, but the mysterious shadow did not reappear. Bradley ascended the stairs, the heavy carpet drowning the sound of his footsteps.

Gingerly he crept to the nearest door, tried the knob, and found it locked. The next one yielded no better result. At the third door he turned the knob and finding it also locked, grunted with disgust, and was about to turn away, when his attention was arrested by a faint, muffled cry from within.

"Unlock the door," whispered Bradley. "Don't be alarmed; I'm a police officer."

The only response was another muffled cry, trailing off into a stiffled moan.

"Gagged probably. Sounds like it, anyway," gritted the Headquarters man. "It's a woman all right."

He flashed his light on the keyhole. The door had been locked from the outside.

Fully alive now to the fact that the shadow he discerned was the silhouette of a human form, and that the skulker was not far off, Bradley wondered if he had not made an error in not following the instructions of Sergeant Moore.

He felt into his waistcoat pocket and drew out a long, thin skeleton key. This he inserted in the lock and smiled with satisfaction when the bolt shot back with a dull, metallic click. Withdrawing the key, Bradley swept the upper hall again with his flashlight, and entered the room.

He held the flashlight at arm's length and pressed the switch.

Tense and alert he waited. Nothing happened. He then played the ray about the room until it rested on a bed. Bradley found it hard to suppress an oath. Clad only in her night-clothes, bound hand and foot with ropes that cut into her soft flesh,

a dirty gag stuffed into her mouth, lay a young girl. Her face was deadly white. Her staring eyes were glaring with terror. As the Headquarters man stared down at her she closed her eyes, shuddered and lay still.

"My God, dead!" groaned Bradley, dragging a chair to the bed and resting the flashlight on the seat so that the light enveloped the prostrate girl. He removed the gag, cut the bonds, and gazed at livid marks on her wrists and ankles.

A hurried examination of the tomb-like room revealed a glass pitcher partly filled with water. This Bradley quickly brought to the bed, and with the aid of his pocket-handkerchief rendered first aid. The girl was not dead, as he at first thought, but unconscious. After a few applications of the cooling water and a little forced between her lips, her eyes fluttered and opened slowly. In the glare of the flashlight the girl discerned the Headquarters man bending over her. The look of terror again crept into her eyes. She shrank from him and a cry of alarm rose to her lips, but the detective checked it by placing his hand over her mouth.

"Hush," admonished Bradley, drawing aside his coat-lapel, disclosing the symbol of his office. "I'm a police officer and came to aid you. Are you able to talk? Where are your clothes?"

"They carried them away to make sure I wouldn't escape," she replied in a whisper. Did you see any of—of them?"

"Who?" urged the officer curiously.

"My jailers. Two men and a woman."

The girl on the bed shuddered and closed her eyes. "I'm so upset," she muttered. "Please take me away from this place. Don't let them frighten me again. I——"

"There, there," soothed Bradley, his strong face wearing a kindly expression. "No one is going to harm you unless it's over my dead body. Rest easy about that, little woman. Tell me who you are and what's the trouble. Take your time, and I'll see if I can't dig up some clothes for you."

The color flooded back to her face as she sat erect and drew the bed covering about her. Then she said hurriedly:

"My name is Edith Strom. I am the niece of the late Captain Strom. I——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Bradley, "do you mean the Captain Strom who was shot in Mexico for supplying arms to the rebels?"

"The same," she nodded.

Bradley shook his head and said quietly: "Go on, please."

"I was at school in New York when my uncle met his untimely end. Captain Strom was a strange man. I saw very little of him till shortly after my mother and father were killed in a head-on collision between the Knickerbocker limited and a fast freight at New Haven ten years ago. They were coming from Chicago, where they had been attending the funeral of my mother's brother. I was in the care of an old family nurse. At that time I was only eleven years old, and attending a private school in the Back Bay.

"My Uncle David was appointed my guardian by Judge Hayden. My father left no will, and after his affairs were investigated the startling discovery was made that he died poor. I was left penniless.

"I was too young to realize the full meaning of my misfortune. My old nurse, who by stinting and depriving herself of many things had saved a little money, offered me a home until I was able to earn a living for myself. It was then that my Uncle David stepped into the breech. He placed an ample sum of money in a trust company to pay for my board and education, then left for parts unknown.

"Several years passed. I heard nothing from him until a week before I left for the boarding school in New York. One afternoon he came to the house. He greeted me affably enough, but something I saw in his eyes belied his cordiality. He curtly told my old nurse that he wished to speak with me alone. She left the room and he turned a deep-set pair of green eyes on me. His piercing gaze made me shudder. He noted my look of alarm and forced a grim smile."

The Headquarters man sat in mute silence, peering through half-closed lids at the girl who claimed relationship to one of

the most notorious filibusters that ever aided a revolution.

"'My dear,' said my uncle suavely, 'you of course know that if you outlive me you will be my sole heir. My house in Fairmont is now in charge of some servants and is at your disposal when you've finished your education. The house, land and furnishings are worth nearly three million dollars. It also contains trophies from every port in the seven seas. All of these will be yours. But it will be only a home. To live it is necessary to have money, and the queer part of my bequest is this: You can't realize one penny on that property and its contents. No, my dear, not one copper penny. I know it sounds queer; but I am queer. Some people say I am crazy. But I'm not saying that I'm going to leave you penniless. Not by a jugful. I have made many fortunes in my day, lost many in speculation, but saved a good round sum also. I'm sailing tomorrow with the tide, and may be away months or years; maybe I'll never return. That's why I wished to see you. If any danger should befall me I am leaving no will nor provision that involves the fortune in gold and greenbacks that will be rightfully yours. My will must be oral. Certain conditions must be carried out.' He arose and tiptoed to the sitting-room door, where he held his head in a listening attitude for a second, then quickly pulled the door open and peered out. Satisfied that the nurse was not eavesdropping, my Uncle David closed the door, lowered himself into a chair before me, and went on with his talk.

"'All my life I've lived by my wits. Although I dealt in contraband I always played fair. I'm a firm believer that every man has more or less sporting blood in his makeup. I have, as perhaps you've already learned. I loved your mother before my brother married her. Your father didn't play square, and didn't even give me a sporting chance. I was a young shipmaster then, with a packet of my own. In my long absence my brother dealt his marked cards from the bottom of the pack—in gambler's parlance—and won your mother from me. He was a poor sport. He blackened my character as black as the devil himself. Your mother believed him.'

"My uncle's voice was husky and he breathed hard. A feeling of pity for the lonely wanderer surged up within me. I arose and placed my hand lightly on his shoulder. With a start he looked up into my face and grasped my hand and almost rudely threw it from his shoulder. 'Sit down,' he snarled, his face working strangely, 'my time is limited, and I've more to say.' Astounded and vexed with myself for showing my weakness, I dropped back into a chair.

"'I will not detain you much longer,' he began again. He was now in full control of his emotions and forced a sickly smile as he added: 'But here between just you and I, with no one to hear my oral will but the Great Redeemer and ourselves, I'll tell you the condition upon which you, and you only, can possess my fortune.

"'If I do not return, and death is legally proven, go to my lawyer, Caleb Long—his office is in the Exchange Building—and he will have my will probated, and you can take charge of 60 Dale street, Fairmont. Next you will be obliged to search the old mansion to locate a secret vault. It is equipped with an ordinary combination dial, and to open it one must know the combination figures.

"'I will not risk making a note of those figures on paper. They must be memorized. Three turns to the left and stop on nine. Two turns to the right and pause on four. One turn right to six. Here's where I'm going to test your sporting blood. If your blood is weak like your father's, you'll fail. If it's deep red like your mother's, you'll win. If you succeed you get a fortune. The other way, and you'll leave this world in a blaze of destruction!'

"I stared at him aghast. Was I listening to the ravings of a madman? I swallowed hard, and asked: 'Just what do you mean, Uncle David?'

"He smiled wearily and shook his head. 'No, I'm not mad. Just a little queer. What I mean is this: There is one more figure on the dial that the knob of the combination must be centered on before the vault door

can be swung open. I know it, but the knowledge will go to the grave with me. I'm to give you a gambler's chance to pick it out. Five turns to the left on eleven, or the same on seven. One will open the vault door. The other will blow you and the house to atoms! That's just what I mean.'

"I sprang to my feet, my face aflame with indignation. 'God!' I cried. 'Do you call that giving me a sporting chance? To revenge yourself on my father you'd murder me! Keep your money and let it rot after your death!'

"My uncle's gaze never left my face. The same leering smile still hovered at the corners of his colorless lips. He waited until my anger had spent itself and I burst into tears; then he spoke:

"'I'll admit,' he said coolly, 'that the whole thing sounds diabolical. Nevertheless, you can take it or leave it.' He then arose, bowed and departed. There isn't much more to tell. I went to New York and completed my schooling. While there my old nurse died, and Uncle David was captured by the Mexican government and executed. My remittance died with the donator. I still had a good education to face the world with. Then my health broke down and I was in doubt what to do. Three weeks ago I crushed my pride and resentment and called on Caleb Long, my uncle's solicitor. He was a crafty-looking man with a perpetual sneer.

"He had the house put in order and, at my request, discharged all the servants. I had a few hundred dollars that I'd saved, so I figured that after a short rest I would be able to secure employment, take moderate quarters in the city, break my uncle's will, and either rent the place or sell it."

Edith Strom paused. The detective arose and pushed his chair aside. The gray dawn was breaking and tiny pin-points of light were visible at the side of the room where he noted a curtained window. Bradley strode to it and rolled up the shade. By the aid of his flashlight he discovered the cause of the inky darkness. On the outside, locked with a massive padlock, was a steel-covered fire-shutter. A few streaks of light were seeping through the jamb near the lower hinge. The Headquarters man turned to the girl again and said:

"Did you ever investigate the story your uncle told about the vault and the hoard of wealth? And you haven't told me how you came to be a gagged and bound prisoner in your own home, and how you managed to call the police."

"Your first question is easily answered," the girl answered. "At times I gave it very serious thought. A few days ago while looking over the house I found myself in the cellar. There were a large furnace and coal and wood bins, a wine closet, nearly empty, and several other rooms for storage. What held my attention most was the size of the furnace. It was the largest one I've ever seen. I opened the firebox door and imagine my surprise to discover that there had never been a fire in it; I knew that each and every room in the house had a large fireplace for burning logs. But I thought it queer that my uncle would install a furnace and never use it. I looked it all over, touching this part and that part, and I nearly fainted when the whole side, that looked like a solid riveted section, swung wide open.

"Recovering from my surprise, I carefully peered within. The grate, which a second before had been lying in place as a grate should, was swung upward, leaving the whole interior large enough to admit a person standing erect. I stepped inside. The concrete floor beneath my feet was not solid. With the aid of a lighted match I carefully examined it and found a heavy iron ring embedded there. My curiosity was beyond bounds now. I never was a coward, so with all my strength I pulled on the ring and swung back on hinges a large block of solid concrete, disclosing a dark, cavernous hole below.

"Trembling with excitement, I gazed at my discovery. My uncle's weird story about his hidden wealth rushed through my brain. I dropped the heavy slab back into place and went into the cellar. I fumbled over the outside surface of the furnace until my fingers touched an innocent-looking rivet near the top. The iron side swung back

into place. Cold perspiration was oozing from every pore in my body when I turned to hurry from the place. But I staggered back. Caleb Long, my uncle's lawyer, stood at the foot of the cellar stairs, his cunning, keen eyes peering at me from beneath bushy brows, and he rubbed his hands together as if in great satisfaction at what he had discovered.

(*Concluded in our next issue.*)

ALMOST HOODWINKS THE COP

DANIEL in the lion's den had nothing on Herman Miller in the Butler street police station in Brooklyn during the Democratic convention. Herman's tactics were even more out of the ordinary in such encounters, but it must be admitted that his coup did fall through at the last minute.

Herman wished to establish his superiority in the matter of appropriating others' property. That is the explanation finally hit upon by Lieutenant Hackett, on desk duty at the station-house. For no utilitarian motive seemed competent. The property appropriated included two first-class cigars and a book of police rules. Herman doesn't smoke, and neither does his best girl, and Lieutenant Hackett says that any one with Herman's natural talents could have no use for rules which guide the actions of ordinary individuals or even policemen.

Anyway, Herman breezed into the station-house all dolled up and looking like a million dollars. He was the only cool proposition in the borough. He was not only that, but according to his own affirmation he was Doctor Miller of St. Luke's Hospital and he was a member of the Democratic National Committee. He was, all in all, somebody to be treated right. The lieutenant saw that in a flash.

First he told who he was. After allowing time for that to sink in, he announced that he was looking for lodgings for twenty women delegates. His story of how they went broke with the end of the convention still far beyond the horizon was truly pathetic. Any one exiled from home for the entire term of the Democratic convention is a subject for pathos anyway.

So the lieutenant promptly put the facilities of the station-house at his convenience. He couldn't put the lady delegates up in the station-house dormitory, he explained, because some of the cops in the precinct were not married and consequently adequate chaperonage would be difficult. But he could see to it that Patrolman O'Brien did all in his power to fix things up. So they arranged that the women should be taken care of at the Judson Memorial Branch of the Y. W. C. A., which, consulted over the telephone, acquiesced.

The doctor-committeeman thanked the lieutenant and moved toward the door. Then a new idea penetrated to the lieutenant. Translated into the vernacular, it was:

"I smell something rotten."

So the lieutenant sniffed again. He asked the man what his license number was, for the visitor had said his car was around the corner. The visitor gave him a number and left. A quick call revealed that number to belong in Buffalo. A quick look revealed the two cigars and the rule book to be missing. A quick dash caught up with the visitor, and he returned for a second visit to the station-house.

This time, to the dignified doctor's astonishment, the lieutenant made a few magic passes in front of him and drew from his pockets two first-class cigars and a book of police rules. Then he stepped over to the desk, wrote busily for a moment, and called in Policeman O'Brien again. This time O'Brien was given a more congenial task. He accommodated the doctor himself, instead of his lady friends, and the accommodation was a cell.

The Phoney Sawbucks

By CARL GARRET HODGES

BENTON looked up from a perusal of the stranger's credentials and handed them back to the tall, slender man who stood across the desk from him.

"All right, Mr. Sherman, I will do anything I can do to help you. I'm glad to be of service to our government."

Sherman smiled.

"We of the Secret Service prefer to play a lone hand. I'm here not so much after material help as for information. Of course, when I take a case in a strange town like this, I have to get the dope on suspects from some one who knows."

"For instance?"

Sherman passed up the hint.

"Chief, who's head of your detectives? I think, through active contact with them, he'd be better able to give me a line on the persons I'm after than you would."

"Lannigan's the pick of my force. He'll be here in a minute, and you can talk things over with him."

When the red-headed detective arrived, Benton performed the necessary introduction.

"Lannigan, this is Mr. Sherman, of the Secret Service. He's looking for a little information which he thinks you may be able to give him."

Lannigan shook his head gravely.

"All right, Mr. Sherman, fire your questions. I'll certainly do the best I can for you."

The two men sank into chairs facing each other in front of Chief Benton's desk. Sherman did the talking.

"Now, I can't give you the details of the entire case, but I must tell you this: In the last few months the country has been literally flooded with counterfeit Federal Reserve notes. We worked in darkness for a while before we were even able to nab a 'passer.' But we did, and through him we came to the conclusion that the counterfeiting plant was in this city. I came down here at once. A later development proved that we were right in our deductions, and even added the identity of the man who is supposed to be the head of the ring."

"Then you're satisfied that the ring's headquarters is located here? What's his name?"

"Anton Boggiano—he has several aliases. I think, Brown and Baker—Boggiano's his real name, though. Typical foreigner, black hair, olive complexion, flashy black eyes—really rather good-looking."

Lannigan smiled.

"I think I know the man you mean, but if he's the head of a gang of counterfeiters it's sure news to me. He's a darn good pickpocket, and his wife's one of the cleverest 'boosters' in the business."

"I see."

"How about Boggiano's hang-out? Do you know where it is, so you can show me the way? I'd like to investigate on the q. t."

"I can tell you where it is, but I can't let you go alone."

"Why?"

"Boggiano's joint is in the very center of the Devil's Kitchen. It's named right, because it's about the toughest district in town, despite the efforts of the police to wipe it out. Your life wouldn't be worth a nickel down there if they knew you. You might get what you want—and then again you might not. I do know you'll have a better chance if I'm with you."

Lannigan left the room for a few minutes.

"Just exactly what are Lannigan's quali-

fications? How did he get the rep?" asked Sherman curiously.

The Chief smiled.

"Two reasons, mainly. He's red-headed —and he's Irish."

At that moment Lannigan entered the room and gestured to Sherman.

"We're bound for Boggiano's. Let's go," he said.

Boggiano and his gang hang-out in the very center of the Devil's Kitchen—a district known in gang and police circles everywhere; a district which brewed more trouble than any other on the continent.

Boggiano's room resembled the interior of a modern job-printing shop, equipped to handle certain kinds of work quickly. That the work was outside the pale of the law worried Boggiano little, if at all. In one corner of the room there stood a small electric press. In another corner, directly under the range of strong bulbs that hung from above, was a second bench, covered with tools and materials of the engraver's art. Directly in the center of the room, its top covered with an acid-holed oilcloth, there stood a table around which three men and a woman were grouped. The rear wall of the room was partitioned off with a hanging of much-wrinkled cretonne, evidently hiding a cot or some sort of sleeping accommodation.

The man with the black eyes was talking.

"Spike, I'm running this show, and you gotta keep your mouth shut. I know what I'm doing, or I wouldn't be doing it."

The man called Spike flushed.

"Yeh, Tony, but our necks is risked on this as well as your'n, so we oughta have something to say about things. How about it, Soapy?"

Soapy McAllister grinned:

"I tinks about the same way. Tony's runnin' the game, but we suffer if he loses, same as him. I say, lay low fer a while. Send these phoneys out and they'll nab us sure."

Boggiano laughed.

"Soapy, you made the plates, and that's all. It looks to me like you're rakin' a swell divvy. And you, Spike, all you do is run that press. There's a lot of risk in that, ain't there?"

Spike lowered his eyes.

"It ain't dangerous, if that's what you mean, but if we get caught we'll suffer as much as you."

The woman now spoke.

"Tony and I run the risk, boys. You make the stuff, but remember, we 'pass' it. We're the connecting link between the two ends. If we don't kick, why should you?"

Boggiano spoke with a note of finality.

"The wife and I has decided to keep on. If you want to quit, you can, as long as you keep your mouth shut."

The others had been making easy money and were loathe to quit.

"Oh, we don't want to quit, we'll stick with you, but if we get nabbed just remember what we told you. Sooner or later the cops are going to call our bluff, then that redhead'll be after us, hot and heavy."

That touched Boggiano's one sore spot.

"Who, Lannigan? He couldn't catch a cold."

Soapy laughed.

"You ain't a cold, and he caught you once. You an' the wife, both."

The wife sneered.

"Somebody snitched or he'd never sent us up the river at all. He was lucky, and no one knows it as well as he. We'll spike his guns for him."

Spike laughed as he turned to his fellow-worker.

"Tony's been doing the brag about picking Lannigan's pockets, but he ain't produced nothing yet."

Tony cursed.

"That year ain't up yet, either, is it? Remember, I said I'd pick his pocket before the year was up."

Soapy got up and walked to the door.

"And I remember what Lannigan's s'posed to have said. 'If Tony does pick my pocket, I'll get back what he took—at the station, in front of the Chief,'" and so saying, Soapy went out.

Half an hour later two disreputable appearing laborers appeared in the lunchroom under Tony's plant. One of them, tall and

slender, carried by a strap from his shoulder a box of miscellaneous plumber's tools. The other fellow was unburdened.

The man with the box accosted the Greek that owned the restaurant.

"Old man Trapp owns this joint, don't he? He sent me to stop a leak in a pipe. Second story flat, I b'lieve."

The Greek shrugged his shoulders.

"I knowa nothing about. Upstairs is a printin' shop."

The man with the box smiled.

"That's what we're lookin' for. How can we get up there?"

"Back stairs. I don't knowa wheth' you git in or not. They just wenta away. Door locked, maybe."

"We'll try it, anyway."

And the two plumbers made their way up the rickety back stairs and stopped before the door of Anton Boggiano's printing shop. The door was locked. But these two plumbers were very resourceful. The tall one produced a bunch of skeleton-keys, and, one by one, tried each one in the lock. Finally one turned the lock, and the door opened at their push. The plumbers stepped into the room and closed the door behind them.

"Lannigan, I think we've got them dead to rights."

Lannigan grinned.

"You've got them when you get the cuffs on them and not before. Sherman, I'm telling you straight."

Sherman was examining the little electric press.

"I guess I'll take the plate with me for evidence. We'll come back later and nab them."

"From the number of bulbs over the room, I'd say that most of their work is done at night. Why not leave things the way they are and come back tonight. We've got the lay of the land. It'll be easy."

Sherman smiled.

"I guess you're right, Lannigan, but let's look around first and see if we can find any fresh stuff."

He walked over to the cretonne curtain and tore it aside, to reveal a cot. He pulled back a corner of the dirty mattress. Lying next to the spring was a neat little package wrapped in brown paper. Sherman opened it with eager fingers. It contained a stock of counterfeit ten-dollar bills. He handed several of them to Lannigan.

"There's the best job of phoney work I've ever seen. That ten-dollar bill is good enough to deceive anybody at a casual glance. You have to look twice to find anything wrong with it. But it's a phoney sawbuck, sure enough."

Lannigan stowed away some of the bills in his vest pocket beneath his overalls.

Then the two plumbers left the room as they had come and locked the door behind them. In a short time they were back at the station in conference with Chief Benton.

At eight o'clock sharp Tony Boggiano and his wife laboriously climbed the rickety stairs above the lunch-room and entered the print shop. Spike and Soapy were working busily at press and bench under the almost blinding glare of the many electric lights. They looked up as Tony and his wife entered and grunted their brief greetings to the pair, but did not stop their work.

But Tony had news that cried for telling.

"Soapy, you said I never would pull the trick over on Lannigan, didn't you? Well, I did, and I did it right. I picked his pocket this afternoon and I cleaned him, wallet and all."

"If you cleaned him, you musta got somethin' to prove it by," sneered Soapy.

Tony reached into his coat pocket and pulled out Lannigan's wallet.

"I got it, but I ain't had a chance to look into it yet. I'll do it now. I wonder what we'll find?"

Slowly he opened the leather flap of the wallet and his ready fingers reached the contents. He pulled out a neat stack of crisp new bills. He laughed as he waved them at Soapy.

"How about that for a haul? What you got to say now?"

Suddenly the smile froze on his face and a look of consternation took its place. His eyes focussed on the sheaf of bills he held in his hand and he cursed.

"I'll be hanged!"

Mescal, his wife, grasped his arm.

"What's the matter, Tony; tell me, what's the matter?"

His face was pale as he held out the bills toward his wife.

"We made those bills and I got 'em off Lannigan. He's on the trail, sure. We better quit for a while, I guess."

Soapy frowned.

"But where did Lannigan get hold of a stock like that?"

Mescal ran to the cretonne curtain that hid the sanitary cot.

"All the surplus we had was under that mattress. If they're gone, it means that Lannigan has been here."

She jerked aside the curtain roughly—and then sprang back in amazement, arms reaching for the ceiling. Standing on the sanitary cot were two men—Sherman, of the Secret Service, and redheaded Lannigan. And sinisterly menacing, they covered Mescal and Tony and Soapy and Spike with two wicked-looking automatics.

Sherman stepped down from the cot and advanced toward the crooks.

"Keep 'em up. Lannigan's liable to bore you. You're all under arrest for counterfeiting. I'm one of the double S boys"—he held up a little embossed metal shield with his hand—"working for Uncle Sam. I'll have to handcuff you all before we take you to the little party we're arranging at Leavenworth."

And they snapped on the bracelets.

Mescal still held the bills Tony had stolen from Lannigan. Sherman took them away from her and grinned at the redheaded detective.

"Lannigan, these are really yours, you'd better take them."

The detective smiled as he restored his automatic to his pocket and stepped down from the cot.

"Give them back to Tony, Sherman; I prefer to get them back at the station, in front of the Chief, when I tell him the tale of the phoney sawbucks."

THE "BLACK MAGS"

SEVERAL robberies in recent weeks, together with the reputed organization of a band who call themselves "The Black Mags" and steal money and candy from the children of rich families, caused the residents of Forest Hills, Queens, to begin a movement for better police protection.

Captain Frank Rohrig of the Elmhurst precinct said that he does not consider the crime situation at Forest Hills serious, and that he had not been able to find any evidence indicating the existence of such a gang as "The Black Mags." He said, however, that in his entire precinct, which covered an area of about 200 square miles, the protection he is able to afford the householders is not at all adequate.

The Elmhurst precinct includes the towns of Winfield, Elmhurst, Forest Hills, Jackson Heights, Corona, Maspeth, Middle Village and the south end of Kew Gardens. In this district are ten police booths, two in Forest Hills and one each in the other villages.

To this territory have been allotted 110 policemen, forty of whom are on vacation or on other assignments. This leaves only sixty men to cover the territory, and since this force is divided into three shifts, only twenty are on duty at a time.

According to the story current in Forest Hills the gang known as "The Black Mags" is composed of boys who steal clothes and money from wealthy boys and give the proceeds of their robberies to poor children. It costs five cents to join the gang, and each member's right arm is stamped with a heart pierced by a dagger.

Belle Starr, the Bandit

BELLE STARR, outlaw queen of the old days in Texas and Oklahoma, wore her hair short and was particularly sweet to women, says the Kansas City *Star*.

She lined up a gang of the meanest looking, hardest cursing, wildest riding hard-boiled customers in her particular parts of the cow country.

Born in Carthage, Mo., February 5, 1848, Belle Starr was the daughter of Judge John Shirley, a hotel keeper. Her maiden name was Myra Belle Shirley. When 21 years old she married James Reed, whose father was a prosperous farmer near Rich Hill. The pair went to Texas, where Reed turned outlaw and was killed in 1879. Belle, with her two children, went to the home of "Uncle Tom" Starr on the South Canadian River, in what now is Haskell county, Oklahoma. She met and married Starr's son, Sam. With him she served a year in the Federal house of correction in Detroit for horse stealing.

"Uncle Tom" Starr is said to have been one of the most dangerous men who ever lived in the Cherokee Nation. His nephew, George ("Hopp") Starr, was the father of Henry Starr, notorious bandit.

Sam and Belle lived at what is known now as Younger's Bend, a long turn of the South Canadian, about seven miles from the present town of Porum. In a cabin hidden away in the wilderness they gave refuge to every bandit who ranged that way northward from the Rio Grande. Frequenters gave Belle a share of their loot in return for her hospitality. She often went with bandits, it is said, on raids, and could ride like a whirlwind, shoot a six-gun like the next one, and if the six-gun wasn't handy she could throw a bowie knife instead. Not that actual killings are checked against her, but there were killings all around, and she was ready to perform if need be.

Any one living near the Belle Starr cabin who set his face in the direction of law and order was the enemy of her and her outfit. Settlers left the law up to the United States marshals, one of whom drew his revolver with Sam Starr at a dance one night. When the smoke cleared away both men were dead. So Belle replaced Sam with a full-blood Cherokee, "Bill" July, who was as notorious a horse thief as any man could want to be.

A story is told of Belle that she led her gang into a town one day on a robbing expedition only to meet a cavalry troop which had been dispatched to Oklahoma to round up the outlaws. Several casualties in her ranks resulted. Later, it is related, she led a retaliatory attack, after which some of her outfit's revolvers had added notches on their handles.

Several stories are told of the way Belle met her death. The generally accepted one is that she was assassinated by a man named Edgar A. Watson, who had gone to Oklahoma from Florida with his family in the 80's and started farming near her place. She kept an eye on strangers and learned from him that he was a fugitive from justice. It is told they became enemies in a dispute over land rental; another story has it that Watson would not "split right." Anyway, on February 3, 1889, so the version has it, a double-barreled shotgun did the work.

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

The feature stories already published in this magazine are worth reading. The following are the titles of the novelettes contained in the numbers already printed.

114 "The District Attorney's Secret," by C. Oursler.
115 "A Man From Headquarters," by H. Craigie.
116 "The Girl in the Case," by Carl Glick.
117 "A Scientific Detective," by D. G. McDonald.
118 "Number Nine Queer Street," by Jack Bechdolt.
119 "Trailed by a Private Detective," by Gottlieb Jacobs.
120 "The Mouse Trap," by Edith Sessions Tupper.
121 "A Radio Mystery," by Capt. Jack Static
122 "The Clawing Death," by Beulah Poynter.
123 "A Master of Millions," by Chas. Fulton Oursler.
124 "The Secret of Room 13," by Hamilton Craigie.
125 "Six Months to Live," by George Bronson-Howard.
126 "Seals of Wax," by Jack Bechdolt.
127 "When Crooks Conspire," by Harold F. Podhaski.
128 "The Mystery of the Blue Car," by H. Craigie
129 "The Detective and the Law," by Frederick F. Shuey.
130 "The Hand in the Dark," by Chas. F. Oursler.
131 "The Trail of a Rogue," by George Bronson-Howard.
132 "The Woman from Nowhere," by Jack Bechdolt
133 "The Time Detective," by Frank Blighton.
134 "The Whispering-Room," by Frederick C. Davis.
135 "One Clue Missing," by Chas. F. Oursler.
136 "The Doom of the Damned," by Joe Burke.
137 "The Consuming Death," by Gilbert Hammond.
138 "Mrs. Deane's Jewels," by Beatrice S. Luisi.
139 "The Brass Voice," by Jack Bechdolt.
140 "For Shame," by Wm. Hamilton Osborne.
141 "The Triple Cross," by Hamilton Craigie.
142 "Blood Rubies," by J. Werner Phelps.
143 "I'll Win! I'll Win!" by Arthur B. Reeve and Margaret W. Reeve.
144 "Phantom Fingers," by George Bronson-Howard.
145 "On the Yellows," by Frank Blighton.
146 "The Argentine Ruby," by Beulah and Shirley Poynter.
147 "The Barrington Arms Case," by Jack Bechdolt
148 "Hounded," by Frank Blighton.
149 "Direct Action," by Dr. Harry Enton.
150 "The Footprints On the Ceiling," by Chas. Fulton Oursler.
151 "The One Chance," by Thomas Ripley.
152 "Weapons of Hate," by Eric Howard.
153 "In Reserve," by Frank Blighton.
154 "The House on the Rocks," by Jack Bechdolt.

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156 "The Medicine Dropper," by G. P. Wilson.
157 "A Question of Kick," by Eugene Jones.
158 "The Mystery at Roaring Waters," by Harry Adler.
159 "The River Pirates," by Hamilton Craigie.
160 "The Shadow of a Noose," by Jack Bechdolt.
161 "At 2 A. M.," by Beulah Poynter.
162 "The Intriguers," by Grover Kidwell.
163 "The Lock and Key," by Hamilton Craigie.
164 "The Talking Dog," by Frank Blighton.
165 "The Heart on the Mirror," by Alexander Morrison.
166 "Mixed Motives," by Eric Howard.
167 "Southwest of the Law," by Hamilton Craigie.
168 "The Hoodwinkers," by George Bronson-Howard.
169 "Walled In," by Frank Blighton.
170 "The Dark Curtain," by M. M. Oblinger.
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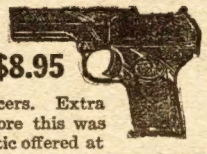

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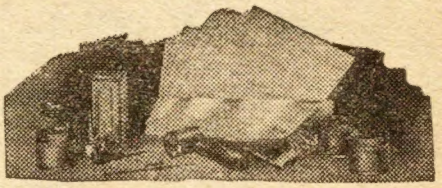

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